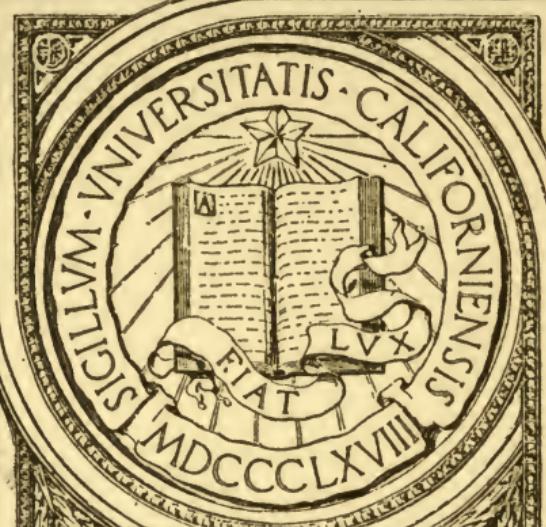


ANDVARI'S  
RING  
ARTHUR  
PETERSON



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*By Arthur Peterson*

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Collected Poems

Andvari's Ring

# Andvari's Ring

By

Arthur Peterson



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MAIN

## NOTE

THE story of Andvari's Ring, of Sigurd and Gunter, of Brynhild and Gudrun, has always had a strong hold upon the human heart. Centuries ago it was a favourite theme of the old Norse skalds and saga-men, and in later days many a poet, dramatist, and musician has yielded to its fascination. William Morris has turned it into modern English verse, and Richard Wagner has woven from it the mightiest of his music-dramas. It has been told and re-told by so many people, and in such a variety of ways, that no excuse is offered by the writer for adding one more variation to the collection. In the following poem the hero is depicted as a young Norse rover, a wanderer not only by land but by sea, this latter innovation seeming to lend itself quite naturally to the established legend. The action is supposed to take place about the middle of the fifth century, that eventful period which may be said to mark the end of the ancient, and the beginning of the modern world.

This ancient story, which is found in its oldest known form in the Icelandic Eddas, (collections

of prose and verse in the Icelandic, or Old Norse, language), is probably based partly upon nature-myths common to the whole Aryan Race, and partly upon an actual historic occurrence; but when, where, or by whom the tale was first put together no one knows. It is found in the literature of all the peoples of Northern Europe; and it was an especial favourite among the Norse races who, after the withdrawal of the Roman garrisons, settled in such preponderating numbers in Britain. It is natural, therefore, that it should be popular among the descendants of those races—the English-speaking peoples of today.

The best blood of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark (or what is commonly known as Scandinavia) seems to have passed over into the British Isles during the long period of colonization (about six hundred years) between the fifth and the eleventh centuries; not only by direct migration and settlement, but by the indirect route of Normandy; for William the Conqueror and his Normans, though they had French names, were probably in lineage at least half Norse. By the best blood I mean not so much the best-conducted and most peaceable persons, as the most energetic, aggressive, daring and adventurous. And there is little doubt that it is to the descendants of these restless, sea-faring spirits that Great Britain owes her centuries of mari-

time supremacy and over-sea colonization. The English adventurers of the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries were but repeating, on a larger scale, the exploits of their ancestors of a thousand years before; and the long line of ocean-heroes, in which Drake and Nelson are perhaps the most conspicuous figures, had its beginning in the bold Norse rovers who, while England was yet in the making, sailed forth upon "the swan's road." This idea is touched upon in the chapter entitled "Erda's Prophecy."

An attempt has been made in the course of the narrative, especially in the chapter entitled "Sigurd and Gudrun," and in "The Song of Olaf the Red," to give the reader some idea of the beautiful mythology of the Anglo-Saxon Race. Though these old gods and goddesses, like those of the Greeks and Romans, may no longer be worshipped as divine personages, yet the names of many of them survive and are in constant use in the English language of to-day, the original meanings, however, being often forgotten. The name of Easter, the goddess of Spring, of Hel or Hela, the goddess of the underworld, of Tyr, Odin, Thor, and Freya, after whom Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday are named, the first and second days of the week being named in honour of the Sun and the Moon, are a few of the many examples which might be quoted. Though dissimilar, in many

respects, to the mythologies of the Greeks and the Romans, yet in many other respects the Anglo-Saxon mythology bears such a close resemblance to them that one cannot help thinking they originally formed one system, in that earlier time when the various branches of the Aryan family were one people, dwelling in the highlands of Western Asia.

The Burgundians, with whom the fortunes of Sigurd become so closely connected, and among whom he finally meets his death, were a Teutonic people whose former home had been the country between the Oder and the Vistula. They migrated toward the west and south, and at the time of our story were settled in the valley of the upper Rhine, in the neighbourhood of Worms. The Burgundians afterward passed over into Gaul, and the territory occupied by them ultimately became part of the celebrated Duchy of Burgundy. After the death of Sigurd a new character appears upon the scene, the celebrated Attila; and in his banquet to the Burgundians and the execution of Hagen we can discern the outlines of a far-off historic event.

The Latin form Scandia has been used throughout the poem in preference to the commoner word Scandinavia, it being better suited to metrical composition.

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# **Andvari's Ring**



**Book I.** *Sigurd*



# CALIFORNIA.

## PRELUDE

### I

SIGURD I sing, a son of that dark north,  
Of that wild Scandian mother-land whence  
sprang

The sea-tost hosts who, in that long ago,  
The bases of imperial England laid:—  
Such as were they, he was—one of that race  
Which ever loved to ride the restless waves,  
Or in grey Scandia, its ancestral home,  
Dwelling, or in the Isles of Britain, where  
Later it throve: men with the eagle's heart,  
Storm-nurtured, calm amid the swirling seas,  
Wanderers upon the deep until this day.  
Sigurd—his birth, his life, his death, I sing.

### II

And Thou, O Muse, without whose aid divine  
My lips, however willing, must be mute,  
Thee I beseech my numbers to inspire.  
Come Goddess now: I reverently attend.

# I

## GUDRUN'S DREAM

### I

THE fair Gudrun, in her bower beside the Rhine,  
On three successive nights had dreamed a dream,  
Piteous, distressful; and to Ursula,  
Her mother, good King Dancrat's widowed  
queen,  
She thus, with tears, unburdened her full heart:

### II

“Dear mother, whilst I slept within my bower,  
On three successive nights to me hath come  
A dream whereof the meaning I know not,  
Piteous, distressful; for methought I loved  
A white gyrfalcon, more than aught else seemed,  
In the whole world, this gallant bird to me,  
With eyes so bright, and plumage like the snow.  
He from his home in the far north had flown  
Southward to Burgundy; I myself had tamed  
His wandering spirit, and upon my hand  
Content he sat whene'er I rode afield,

What time the hern we hunted with our hawks.  
But one thrice-sorrowful day, as into air  
Swiftly he rose, sighting his quarry, lo!  
Two eagles fierce, wheeling from out the hills  
In circles vast, inexorable, grim,  
Beset and slew him; and methought my grief  
Was like the grief of her who loses all—  
Or what seems all when Death hath struck his  
blow—  
The wife her husband or the mother her child."

**III**

Then spoke Queen Ursula: solicitude  
Dwelt in her voice, disquiet in her mien:  
"Oft in our dreams the future lives, and thus,  
My daughter, do I read thy vision wild.  
Perchance I read it wrong; but, as thou know'st,  
At Yule-tide was I born, the seventh child  
Of seventh child, and second-sight is mine—  
A power clairvoyant granted by the gods.  
This, then, the interpretation of thy dream:  
The white gyrfalcon is a noble youth  
Whom thou wilt learn to love with all thy soul.  
The eagles fierce two cruel warriors are  
Whose spears shall slay thy lord. Alas, Gudrun!  
Methinks that by the hand of Skuld herself,  
Who sits beside the ash-tree Ygdrasil  
Gazing upon the future, was dispatched  
This vision, in whose happenings I discern

**Andvari's Ring**

The dread announcement of a deed to come.  
Ruth hath my mother's heart for thee, Gudrun;  
Thy falcon falls before the eagles twain.  
O woeful hour! As swift-descending storm  
Darkens the day, so shall this murder foul  
Becloud the sunny springtime of thy life.  
Thy lord lies still in death. So speak the  
Norns!"

**IV**

Thus Ursula: and by her mother's words  
O'ercome, upon an ancient couch near by,  
Like broken lily, sank the fair Gudrun.

## II

### THE COMING OF SIGURD

#### I

GUNTER, the king of the Burgundians, gave  
A mighty feast, to celebrate that day,  
Seven years before, whereon his reign began.  
For when his father, old King Dancrat, died,  
Leaving, besides a widowed queen, three sons,  
Gunter and Giselher and Gernot bold,  
And one fair maid, the flower of the land,  
Gudrun,

Gunter, the eldest, was proclaimed the king.  
And throve his kingdom. For a respite brief  
From battle left men time for kindlier deeds.  
And woods were felled; and fields of waving  
grain

Covered the land; and towns sprang up anew;  
And trade with Rome, increasing, filled the  
realm

With Roman gold, and brought to wondering  
eyes

The silks and jewels of the mystic East.

So in his palace by the Rhine, where dwelt  
A Roman pretor once, King Gunter bade  
Prepare this banquet, to commemorate  
The day his hand first grasped the helm of state.

## II

That time in summer was it when the days  
Longest and loveliest are, when leafy June  
Mantles the earth, and Gunter's capital  
(Called by the Romans Borbetomagus,  
And by the men of later centuries Worms)  
Sat, like a beauteous bride, beside the Rhine.

## III

Now on the morning of the festive day,  
While yet the summer sun was low in the east,  
Appeared far down the Rhine, but moving up  
Against the stream, their sails filled by the breeze,  
Three galleys. Them a watchman from his  
tower  
Descried, and to King Gunter brought the word.  
Whence came they no man knew. And now  
the wind  
Carries them nearer, and the morning sun  
Blazons each carven, golden-headed prow,  
And gaily-broidered sail. And lo! within,  
Sitting upon the rowers' benches some,  
And others grouped on forecastle and poop,  
The bold and brawny crews of mail-clad men,

Sons of the ocean, with their red shields hung  
Outboard along the gunwales. And to eyes  
That watched the scene the foremost galley  
looked

A mighty dragon, breasting Rhine's broad flood.  
For her high-arching prow was shaped and carved  
Like dragon's front, with gilded crest upreared  
Above the wave; and all along each side  
The warriors' shields like dragon's scales ap-  
peared;

And, looking aft, the high and curling stern  
Ended a dragon's gilded tail in air.

And of her sister ships a great wolf's head  
Carved out of wood, with grim wide-open jaws,  
One bore upon her bow, the other a bear's,  
Both fancifully gilded. In this wise,  
A gallant sight, were built these galleys three.

### IV

Then said King Gunter: "Let my men-at-  
arms  
Be ready, but no hostile act disclose.  
Or friend or foe I know not, but methinks  
Peace and not war is in the stranger's heart."

### V

Now toward the river's bank each galley turns,  
And soon the sails are lowered, and in a cove  
Near by the vessels rest; and from the side

Of one, the largest galley of the three,  
Whose prow a gilded dragon's front displayed,  
Is thrown a gangplank to the river shore;  
And over this, forthwith, a figure steps—  
Tall—straight—with wingèd helm and byrnies  
bright—  
And after him a score of viking forms,  
With spear in hand and shield on arm, and to-  
ward  
The palace of the king all take their way.

## VI

Now when the strangers to that spot had come  
Where Gunter stood, flanked by his men-at-  
arms,  
They halted, and one lifted high in air  
A snow-white shield, as if to signal Peace.  
And he who seemed the leader—by his dress,  
And face and noble bearing—left his men,  
And toward King Gunter slowly strode alone.  
And Gunter, reading in the stranger's mien  
A brother ruler—whether great or small  
He knew not, still a leader among men—  
Stepped likewise from his soldiery apart,  
And toward that other slowly strode alone.  
And in mid-field the two, unguarded, met.

## VII

Spoke then the stranger, courteous his salute;  
“Art thou King Gunter, ruler of this realm?”

And Gunter answered: "Aye." That other  
then:

"My name is Sigurd, from that far northland,  
Scandia yclept by men of Roman tongue,  
I come, with these three galleys which thou  
seest

In yonder cove, and mariners six score;  
All hardy Norsemen, nurtured by the sea,  
Rough foster-mother, from their earliest days.  
Wanderers are we, our ships our homes, our  
trade

To pull the oar, to steer, to set the sail,  
And, when occasion calls, to draw the sword,  
For like the eagle's are our lives, O King!  
But not in quest of booty do I come  
Today, nor on adventures warlike cruise,  
But rather to fulfil a project dear,  
Born of the wandering instinct in my heart,  
And grown now to a purpose of my life  
O'ermastering:—To behold, ere youth and  
strength

Depart, and old age mark me for the grave,  
The mighty world; to see with mine own eyes  
Rome, and the wondrous East, and what  
beyond

Lies, if in truth there lies a land beyond,  
Or holy Asgard, as our sagas teach.  
And up this noble river have I sailed  
These many days, and feasted on its charms,  
Pursuant to this purpose of my heart.

Friends are we then, O King, and friendship  
crave

From thee. But if some wild adventure wait,  
Or thou hast present need of gallant men  
For war, which oft comes when expected least,  
Command my sword. These be all vikings  
bold,

Stout sea-dogs every one, who know not fear,  
But love to breast the buffets of the storm  
When blows the dark northeaster o'er the wave;  
And love still more, while valkyrs o'er them fly,  
To front the battle's furious stress; to hear  
The battle's music;—the clash of sword against  
sword,

The shock of axe on helm, the pit-a-pat  
Of the arrows' hail upon the shield. True sons  
Of Odin and of Thor be these, O King;  
And what I bid them do they'll do—or die."

### VIII

He ceased, and Gunter thus to him replied:  
"Welcome, brave knight, to the Burgundian  
land!"

No wars have I at present, though a bold  
Adventure long hath occupied my dreams  
(Of which hereafter will I speak to thee),  
Wherein thy eager spirit, and the skill  
Of these stout mariners would aid me much.  
But for today let's have no more of war,

But wassail only. In the banquet hall  
Of yonder palace is a feast prepared.  
Be thou my guest, brave knight. And as for  
these,

Thy merry men, they're welcome one and all.  
And to their comrades, who in yonder cove  
Remain, on board thy sea-tost ships, I'll send  
Cattle and sheep and ale and whate'er else  
Is found upon the tables in the hall,  
That all may join in our festivities.  
For on this day, seven years ago, my reign  
Began; and I today would celebrate  
Fitly, and as becomes a king, the event."

### IX

He ceased: the two clasped hands: and Sigurd  
thus,  
With all his men, became King Gunter's guests.

### III

#### THE BANQUET

(Including Sigurd's Narrative)

##### I

THE feast is on in Gunter's banquet hall,  
And up and down the vast interior  
(A parallelogram in shape, whose length  
Extends three times its breath) reigns, every-  
where,  
The merry wassail of the olden time.

##### II

Upraised upon a dais, at one end  
Of the great hall, the table of the king  
Athwart-ships ran, stretching from side to side.  
Here sat, apart from the wild feast below,  
Yet of it; seeing all, by all beheld;  
Gunter, his household, and his guests of rank:—  
Ursula, his mother, the queen dowager;  
The fair Gudrun, his sister golden-haired,  
And many a lovely damsel of the bower;

Gernot and Giselher, his brothers twain;  
Hagen, the captain of his men-at-arms;  
And others, kin or in authority:  
And here, the guest of honour, seen of all,  
Upon the king's right hand Earl Sigurd sat.

## III

Beginning at the dais' central step,  
Set at right angles to the royal board,  
A mighty table ran the whole hall's length  
(Ran fore-and-aft, to use a sailor's phrase),  
And here were Gunter's men-at-arms and here—  
Each one between two spearmen, that the guest  
Might want for nothing—Sigurd's vikings sat.

## IV

And lackeys, low beneath their heavy loads  
Bending, brought in the wild boar barbequed,  
And quarter-beeves, and giant platters filled  
With flesh of deer and sheep, and sucking pigs  
Tender and savory, and great loaves of bread,  
And wild-fowl grilled and served on wooden  
spits,  
And huge squab-pies, and fish from out the  
Rhine,  
And fruit and honey from Burgundian farms.  
And round and round the mighty drinking-horns  
Passed with the nut-brown ale or sparkling  
mead,

Passed, with their precious freight, from lip to  
lip,

Ever to be replenished and repass,  
Filled from great casks within the cellar stored.  
And Norseman and Burgundian drank "Was-  
hael"

Each to the other, and ere the bearded lips  
Were dry, "Skoel to the viking," and again  
"Prosit," and mellow friendship ruled the hour,  
For Bacchus doth make brothers of us all.

And ever and anon the harpers sang  
Their songs of battle, and the loud applause  
Of hands and voice the approbation marked  
Of warriors who themselves had fought the  
fight.

Sailors their yarns did spin, and soldiers too,  
Each vying with the other, and merrily wagged  
The yellow beards as in Valhalla, when  
With Odin and with Thor the heroes feast.  
And fiercer harped the skald, and louder rose  
The laughter and the Bacchanalian song,  
Till revel inextinguishable filled  
The spacious hall, while waxed the summer  
night  
To midnight, and then waned into the dawn.

## V

Meanwhile, upon the dais, gentler scenes  
Were passing; gentler themes engaged the  
tongue;

As ever must it be when ladies sit  
Brave knights among, and lend to banquet hall  
The sweet restraint of their companionship.  
And when the meats were ended, and the sweets  
Circled the board, and gay contentment reigned,  
King Gunter bade his foremost serving-man  
Each golden goblet fill with Roman wine,  
And then, toward Sigurd looking, slowly spoke:

## VI

"On this, the anniversary of that day,  
Seven years ago, whereon my reign began,  
A noble guest, from the far distant north,  
By gales auspicious wafted to these shores,  
Sits with us at our banquet table. Him  
My heart doth much delight to honour. Him  
I ask you all to welcome as my friend.  
Fierce battles hath he fought, weird perils  
faced—  
Faced and o'ercome. And if, tonight, per-  
chance,  
Patience he hath to tell us of his life,  
And all its strange adventures manifold,  
An audience willing hath he at this board.  
But if the toils of travel him have left  
Wearied, and for long speech yet disinclined,  
Some other time, more opportune, we'll hope  
His wanderer's tale to hear. Meanwhile a cup  
Of good red wine (wine by my grandsire brought

From mighty Rome, made on the rocky hills  
Of fair Chianti, precious beyond compare)  
Let's drink with him—a pledge of friendship  
true—

Trusting that long our honoured guest he'll be.  
Was-hael, Earl Sigurd! Gunter thee salutes,  
And welcomes thee to Burgundy! Was-hael!"

**VII**

So speaking, to his bearded lips he raised  
The golden cup, studded with precious stones,  
Which stood beside his plate—now to the brim  
Filled with the rosy wine of Italy.  
And all who round the royal table sat,  
Fair women and brave men, with one accord,  
Joined in the monarch's greeting to his guest,  
Crying "Was-hael! Earl Sigurd!" while in cups  
Of rosy wine friendship to him they pledged.

**VIII**

Then Sigurd, rising to his feet, thus spoke:  
"King Gunter, ladies, knights—for these kind  
words,  
This royal welcome, let me thank you all.  
Friends may I call you, for I feel that friends  
We are and shall be. Little did I think,  
This summer morn, as up yon noble stream  
I steered, with vessels three, on wanderings bent,

That I such courteous words, such kindly hearts,  
Such regal hospitality should meet.  
Surely no ladies fairer, knights more brave,  
Walk the green earth than those of Burgundy.  
Surely no land—not even my Northland—  
spreads

More beautiful beneath its azure skies  
Than Burgundy. Surely no country boasts  
A nobler king than thou art, Gunter, King  
Of the Burgundians. And since thou, tonight,  
Hast honoured me by asking of my life,  
Its wild beginnings and adventures weird,  
Right gladly will I speak, and briefly tell  
My tale. But first to thee and to thy house  
Friendship and fealty, in this good red wine,  
I fain would pledge. And may the gracious  
bond  
Never be broken, wheresoe'er I roam!"

## IX

He lifted high in air his golden cup  
And cried "The King!" And thereupon uprose  
All that bright company of knights, and stood  
With golden goblets lifted high in air,  
And cried "The King!" And dames and  
damsels fair  
Echoed, with voices sweet, the loyal toast,  
Crying "The King!" And o'er the oaken  
board

**Andvari's Ring**

The golden goblets, thus upheld in air,  
Each near the other, formed a bright ellipse,  
A glittering aureole crowning the fair feast.  
Beautiful was the scene! And when the toast  
In good Chianti had been drunk, and the knights  
Once more had ta'en their seats, and silence  
    fell,  
Sigurd began the story of his life.

## SIGURD'S NARRATIVE

### I

IN the far Northland was I born, O king!  
That land of the long winter night! That land  
Where scarce sets the midsummer sun! That  
land

Of mountains and blue water, where the fiords  
Of ocean with the forests intertwine.  
Sigmund my father, and my mother sweet  
Siglinda. In Valhalla rest their souls.

### II

A noble king my father, Sigmund, was;  
Bright, puissant, the brave son of a great sire—  
Volsung, a name renowned throughout the  
north.

But e'en the bravest, when his hour hath come,  
Must die, for who can strive against the Norns;  
And by the hand of Hunding, son of Raud,  
A king cold-hearted, evil-minded, base,  
Was slain my father. So the grisly night,  
Suddenly swooping, doth blot out the sun.

And by the hands of Hunding's warriors fell  
All but a remnant of my father's men—  
True-hearted vikings, but the fight was vain.  
And harried was the land, and cruel spears  
Reddened with innocent blood the mountain  
stream,  
And flames devoured the hamlet, and afar  
To other countries fled those who escaped,  
Till in my father's land, at last, there seemed  
Naught living but the vulture and the wolf.

**III**

Now deep within the forest hidden—so deep  
That Hunding's spears ne'er found his habitat—  
There dwelt an aged man, Regin by name.  
Him oft my father's hand had guarded, him  
My mother had befriended oft. A smith  
Wondrous was he; and swords and spears and  
shields,  
And byrnies bright, and battle-axes keen,  
He fashioned; and my father prized his skill  
Above that of all other smiths, and praised  
The strength and beauty of his handiwork.  
Ancient he was, none knew his years, no kin  
He seemed to have; but rumour said his race  
Was long extinct, he only had survived,  
Carrying his knowledge down the centuries.  
A creature of a different age he seemed,  
Belonging to the long-forgotten Past.

Him did my mother, in that bitter hour  
When Hunding's hate had robbed her of her  
lord,

Remember (as the hunted deer recalls  
A refuge); and to his wild forest forge,  
With me, a boy of scarce seven years, she fled.  
And thither faithful henchmen brought, by  
night,

My father's body and his broken sword—  
Gram, whom the hand of Odin once had grasped.  
And for a little space my mother lived.  
But as some gentle plant, to alien soil  
Transferred, droops slowly to its death, so  
drooped

My mother, and did slowly waste away;  
Till came a time when her the woodland wild  
Beheld no more, and in that world above  
Her gentle spirit did rejoin its mate.

## IV

And Regin took the boy, myself, and taught—  
Or strove to teach—his crescent spirit all  
The secrets of the smith's time-honoured craft.  
How from the primal ore to summon forth—  
Led by his master-hand through changing  
shapes—

Those objects bright and beautiful and strong  
Born of the hammer and the anvil. How  
To forge the spear's head and the arrow's point,

To fabricate the hauberk and the helm,  
To temper the bright sword, of weapons king,  
Till like Thor's lightning-bolt, swift, terrible,  
'Twould cleave its way, unchecked, through  
stoutest steel.

And how to fashion from the ruddy gold  
Rings, torques, and bracelets, also did he teach;  
And drinking-cups, o'erspread with lucky runes.  
And likewise me the lore of Greece and Rome  
He taught, and how to read the starry heavens,  
And in the art of skald and saga-man  
Instructed me, for many things he knew.  
Aye, all the wisdom of the world seemed his.  
And these I loved, for somewhat of the bard  
Doth dwell within me, and my hand can strike  
Deftly the harp when me the spirit moves.  
But I the smithy's smoky air loved not.  
Rather the green-leaved forest and the chase,  
Or ocean, and the long lift of the wave.  
My part to wield the sword and boar-spear,  
not

To make them. For each spirit hath its work,  
And in that work delights, whate'er it be,  
And doing other, joy becomes dull toil.  
And Regin, though the same, from day to day,  
His smithy-task he taught me, read my heart,  
And knew it loved the forest, not the forge,  
And hungered for adventure, not to pass  
A sooty lifetime by the smithy fire.  
But pleased he seemed with his wild pupil's bent

Rather than disappointed, and one morn,  
Standing beside his anvil, thus he spoke:

## v

"Little use it is to teach King Sigmund's son  
The secrets of the patient craftsman's art.  
As well try to instruct the lion's whelp  
In all the busy beaver's wondrous ways,  
Or ancient lore of the laborious ant.  
Willing thou art, my lad, but thou wast made  
For other things:—to handle men, not tools;  
To battle for thy people, and to rule  
Justly thy realm. For every age hath need  
Of such as thou—fearless and strong and true.  
In thee thy sire and grandsire live again.  
Take thou the sword, therefore, mine ancient  
    hands  
Shall forge thee, and go forth into the world:  
Thy father's sword, Gram, which in that last  
    fight  
Did Odin, for some unknown reason, break.  
His hand, not Hunding's, 'twas which struck  
    the blow,  
For Gram by mortal man was never riven.  
But not for us it is, with human minds,  
To question the high wisdom of the gods.  
The sword he gave, that sword he took away,  
And now to thee it goes. So speak the Norns.  
Pray sit thee down, that I may tell the tale.

## VI

"A noble hall thy grandsire, Volsung, built,  
Oblong in shape, with great doors at each end,  
And fitted up within with tables long  
And benches stout, whereat his merry men  
Wassailed, while on the wall the glittering shield  
Hung idle, flanked by battle-axe and spear.  
And in the middle of this banquet hall  
An oak-tree, vast and venerable, grew—  
Branstock his ancient name—whose towering  
trunk  
Soared through the roof, and in the outer air  
Bloomed with a myriad branches. Now one  
night,  
When lighted were the fires in the great hall—  
For winter time it was—and wagged the beards  
Merrily, and the horns of nut-brown ale  
Circled the board, there strode into the hall  
A stranger with a drawn sword in his hand.  
One-eyed he was and huge, a great slouched hat  
Betopped his golden locks, and a blue cloak  
Covered his shoulders. Not of earth he seemed,  
But mystic, superhuman. Such his mien  
None dared accost him. Odin 'twas in truth.  
Through the great hall, and toward the old  
oak-tree  
Swiftly he strode; then, for a moment, stopped,  
And into Branstock plunged his glittering blade.  
Up to its hilt in the great trunk it sank.

Then Odin spoke: ‘Whoso from out this stock  
Shall draw this sword, to him it shall belong;  
A gift from me. No better weapon lives  
‘Twixt earth and heaven. Gram have I named  
it—Gram

The Wrath.’ So saying, from out the banquet  
hall,

Huge, mystical, he passed; and in the night  
Vanished, and for a moment none dared move  
Or speak, but all like statues dumb remained,  
Awed by this presence from another world.

Then spoke, at last, thy grandsire, Volsung,  
thus:

## VII

“Honoured am I that to my banquet hall  
Hath come, this night, Odin, of gods the chief.  
And honoured will that puissant warrior be  
Who from old Branstock draws the glittering  
steel.

Fain I, myself, at once, would clutch yon hilt  
And make the attempt, but courtesy forbids;  
And to my guests, in the order of their rank,  
First will the trial be given. Earl Sigger, thou  
Lead off, and Heaven accord thee just success.’

## VIII

“He ceased, and Sigger rose—a grim-faced earl  
Of forty winters—and with brawny hands

Grasped the bright hilt. With might and main  
he strove,  
While from his sea-tanned forehead broke the  
sweat  
Of fierce endeavour, but never budged the  
sword.

And then stalked forth, one after another, men  
Famous of old, lords of the land, and clutched,  
In turn, that hilt, and to dislodge the blade  
Stroved, but in vain, till at the last remained  
No guest without his trial. Then Volsung  
spoke:

**IX**

“Methinks the opportunity to me  
Fairly hath come, but ere I set my hand  
To draw from out his oaken scabbard Gram,  
I would that Sigmund first, my eldest son,  
Essay the deed. Eager he is, I know:  
Stout-hearted, and of strength beyond his years.  
Perchance the youth may win where men have  
failed.”

**X**

“At this thy father, then a lissome lad  
Of twenty, tall and golden-haired, stepped forth  
And, grasping in his hands the bright hilt, drew,  
As easily as from out a limpid pool,  
The sword of Odin from the old oak-tree.

## XI

"Amazement reigned and awe and, in some breasts,

Black envy, which doth ever dog success.

But Volsung proudly smiled upon the boy,

And, in a voice affectionate, thus spoke:

## XII

"Honoured art thou, my lad, above all men!  
Bright doth the future lie before thee! Who  
Thee can resist, with Gram within thy hand?  
Aye, well beloved of the immortal gods  
Art thou, Sigmund, my son. Mind that thy life  
Keep to high levels, like the eagle's flight;  
Worthy of him whose favour thou hast won."

## XIII

"Thereafter did thy father wear the sword  
Ever upon him, and in many a fierce  
Battle its magic virtues proved; and ne'er  
Did Gram once fail him till that fatal hour  
When Odin, for some unknown reason, broke  
The brand, and laid thy father low in death,  
And unto hateful Hunding gave the fight.

## XIV

"But I the mystic shards have kept, and now  
For thee, with Odin's help, will I re-forgo

Gram, that the son may emulate the sire,  
And thou mayst have a blade meet for thy need."

## xv

So Regin took the shards of Gram, and forged  
From them a sword e'en like the first, with hilt  
Golden, and mystic runes upon the blade.  
And when he bore it from the forge—ere yet  
The hilt was fitted and the runes engraved—  
Fire seemed to play about its tempered edge  
Like lightnings. And I grasped the sword and  
cried:

"Now, Master, will we prove our weapon!"  
With that

I smote the smithy anvil, and the sword  
Clove through the iron block down to the stock,  
And on the floor the anvil, cut in twain,  
Rolled heavily, but not broken was the sword  
Nor dented, and I cried, "So far, so good!"  
And thereupon we went, Regin and I,  
Out to a mountain stream, and Regin cast  
A lock of lamb's wool up against the stream,  
And when it floated down upon the sword,  
'Twas cut asunder, so keen-edged was that  
blade,  
And wild with joy I waved the brand on high.  
Then, grasping Regin's ancient hand in mine,  
"Master," I cried, "through thee is Gram  
re-born,

What fierce assaults of men, what perils weird,  
Can I not face, with this to back my cause!  
Name me, O Master, some adventure wild  
Wherein my sword a baptism red may earn,  
And I, perchance, earth of some monster rid."

**XVI**

And Regin answered: "Prescient words are these.

Unwittingly thy lips have named the deed.  
If thou dost win, glory world-wide is thine,  
Riches incalculable. If thou dost lose,  
Grim death will be thy portion. On yon bank  
Let us sit down, that I may tell a tale  
Of bygone years, when this grey spirit was  
young."

**XVII**

Then spoke the master to his pupil thus:  
"In the old days, when the gods walked the earth,  
Odin, Loki and ancient Hoenir once  
Beside a waterfall sat down to rest;  
And as they laughed and chatted they beheld,  
Not far away, upon the river's brink,  
An otter with a salmon in its mouth,  
Caught freshly. Then did Loki, in whose heart  
Mischief was ever brewing, cast a stone

Swiftly, and slew the otter, and its skin  
 Stripped from the carcass, and gaily to his belt  
 Hung it. Quoth he, 'A trophy of the chase.'

## XVIII

"Now, in the evening, to a woodsman's hut,  
 Hreidmar yclept, they came; and when the man  
 Sighted, at Loki's belt, the otter's skin,  
 Dark fury seized him. 'Murderer base!' he  
 cried,  
 'Whence gatest thou that skin?' And Loki  
 smiled,  
 And, smiling, spoke: 'Beside a waterfall,  
 At noon, we rested; I and my two friends.  
 And as we laughed and chatted we beheld,  
 Not far away, upon the river's brink,  
 An otter with a salmon in his mouth,  
 Caught freshly. And the beast I slew forthwith  
 And flayed him, and his pelt about my waist  
 Fastened. Behold! A trophy of the chase.'

## XIX

"Then Hreidmar: 'Thou hast slain my young-  
 est son,  
 Otter, who oft, by witchcraft, did assume  
 The otter's shape that he more easily  
 Might land the wily salmon from the stream.  
 I know the waterfall,—his favourite haunt.

Murderer thou art, and murderers are thy  
friends,  
And straightway shall ye die, that my son's  
death  
May be avenged. Ho! Fafnir! Regin! Quick!

## xx

"At this there strode into the little hut  
A giant low of brow, of aspect fierce,  
Fafnir, old Hreidmar's eldest son; and him  
Close following came the second son, myself.  
Ages ago was this, when earth was young—  
For, as thou knowest, my life is full of years,  
Ancient beyond the dreams of men—but still  
Vivid, distinct as yesterday, doth show  
Before my memory's eye, that fatal night.  
Well-armed my father Hreidmar was; well-  
    armed  
Fafnir and I, with spears and axes good;  
And hapless seemed the plight of the three  
    gods;  
For, as thou knowest, when the immortal gods  
Put off their god-head, and assume the shapes  
Of mortal men, and walk the ways of earth,  
Subject to earthly laws they straight become.  
Thus was it now, and hopeless seemed their  
    plight;  
Spirits eterne in earthly bodies caught;  
Valhallan gods by earthly churls oppressed.

**XXI**

"Then suddenly Hreidmár to his victims spoke:

'Villains, one chance I'll give you for your lives.  
Cover yon otter skin with glittering gold,  
Aye, every hair, and hence ye may depart!'

**XXII**

"Then Loki: "'Tis a bargain! My two friends  
Here will I leave, fit hostages, and soon  
Laden with glittering gold will I return.'

**XXIII**

"Beneath the waterfall a cavern deep  
Opened, though from the prying eyes of men  
Screened was its narrow entrance by the fall.  
And here the wily dwarf, Andvari, dwelt,  
Chief of the Niblungs; and, in galleries dark,  
Ever his gnomes here mined the yellow gold.  
And here was hidden that Niblung treasure  
vast,

Famous of old: bags, boxes filled with coins  
Golden and silvern; beautiful ornaments—  
Rings, neck-chains, bracelets, fillets for the  
hair,  
Brooches and buckles, earrings, lockets, combs,  
All of fine gold, and most of them with gems

Adorned, with dazzling diamonds, fairest pearls,  
Rubies and sapphires, opals, emeralds rare,  
Green as the ocean deeps where Ægir reigns;  
And lamps and table vessels of fine gold—  
Wonderful platters, drinking-cups, great bowls,  
With many a mystic rune inscribed thereon.  
And round about, upon the cavern walls,  
Hung swords and spears, helmets and byrnies  
bright,  
Daggers and knives, and other warlike gear.  
And in the nooks and crannies of the rocks  
Strange odds and ends had found a home.

Whate'er

Seemed to the Niblung's avaricious eye  
Of value, great or small, was here. A hoard  
Motley and vast it was: one-half, methinks,  
Born of the anvil of Andvari, half  
Gathered through centuries from the outer  
world.  
Spoil of slain armies! Loot of pillaged homes!  
Flotsam and jetsam of wrecked argosies!

#### XXIV

"Well known to Loki was Andvari's hoard,  
And in his present need thereto he turned,  
Though little, in Valhalla, do the gods  
Value earth's riches. In that high abode  
All joys are theirs: naught else to be desired.  
Only on earth is yellow gold the king.

## XXV

" Now oft, within the stream, below the fall,  
 Andvari, in the likeness of a pike,  
 Sported,—for he the power of changing shapes  
 Possessed,—and on this summer evening fair  
 He sought its cooling waters crystalline.  
 Him there did Loki find, and in a net  
 Magic (by Ran the wife of Ægir made)  
 Captured, and thus addressed the wily dwarf:

## XXVI

" Andvari, well I know thee: naught can change  
 That serpent eye of thine. Loki I am.  
 Now listen: three bags of gold must thou to-  
 night  
 Take, and to Hreidmar's hut them swiftly bear,  
 That I my friends, Odin and Hoenir old,  
 May ransom. Gold enough an otter's skin  
 To cover, aye, every hair, Hreidmar demands,  
 For I unwittingly have slain his son.  
 Quick must we act. How say'st thou, Niblung?  
 Yes?  
 'Tis well; else would this good right hand have  
 crushed  
 Thy miser's life out, though it were in shape  
 Of fish or fowl or serpent dark disguised.'

## XXVII

" He ceased, and thus Andvari answered him:  
 ' Let me once more my natural shape assume,

And I will strive the gold to gather. Ah me!  
Good Loki, little my poverty thou know'st.  
But I will do my best. Yea, three full bags  
Of gold I promise. Pray release me now.'

## XXVIII

"At this the god upon the frightened dwarf  
Relaxed his hold and him upon the ground  
Cast; and Andvari straightway reassumed  
His human shape and, toward the waterfall  
Moving, cried out, 'Valhallan, follow me!'

## XXIX

"Now when they reached the cavern's mouth  
the dwarf  
Halted and, crying 'Enter!' stood on one side.  
And Loki entered and beheld the vast  
Chamber, from which long corridors branched  
out,  
Leading to other chambers underground.  
And everywhere swart Niblungs, grimy gnomes,  
His eye encountered: bags of treasure some  
Carried to and fro, and others at the forge  
Wrought, and yet others in deep galleries toiled  
With pick and shovel—all on labour bent,  
Labour unending. And Andvari cried,  
'Ho slaves! Three bags of gold!' And straight-  
way rushed

Three Niblung gnomes, and seized the bags, and  
them

Fetched to their master. And Andvari said,  
'Here is the gold. Let us away!' At once  
Each gnome upon his back hoisted a bag  
And, following Loki and Andvari, passed  
Out of the cave, into the forest wild.

## xxx

"Now when to Hreidmar's fateful hut had come  
This strange procession Loki through the door  
Strode, smiling, followed by the Niblung  
chief,

Andvari, and his grimy goblins three,  
Who on the floor their bags of treasure cast.  
And Loki cried, 'Here is the gold! Bring  
forth

The otter's skin, that we may cover it!'  
And thereupon my father brought the skin,  
And stretched it on the floor, and fell to work,  
Greedily, to cover with the shining gold  
The furry garment of his otter son.  
But though at first more than enough there  
seemed

Of treasure, as my father wrought the skin  
Grew larger, or, at least, so seemed to grow,  
Till, at the last, when empty was each bag,  
One hair upon the muzzle of the beast  
Was still uncovered. Then my father spoke:

## XXXI

“‘Methinks one muzzle-hair—plain to be seen—  
Is not yet covered! What say ye, knaves, to  
this?

Know that your bargain ye must wholly keep,  
And covered must be every single hair,  
Or ye must die! What say ye, villains? Quick!’

## XXXII

“Then Loki, turning to Andvari, spoke:  
‘Niblung, hast thou more gold?’ Answered the  
dwarf:  
‘No more have I, my lord; here or elsewhere.’

## XXXIII

“But Hreidmar’s was the greed insatiate. Thus  
Coldly he spoke: ‘Methinks upon the hand  
Of that dark dwarf a glittering ring I see—  
A golden serpent with two ruby eyes—  
Throw that upon the skin and ye are free.’

## XXXIV

“Andvari then: ‘Rather my life than that!’

## XXXV

“But, wild with the lust of gold, old Hreidmar  
clutched  
Fiercely the dwarf; and, him as in a vise  
Holding, from off his finger wrenched the ring.

**XXXVI**

"Rage uncontrollable Andvari seized.  
 'Accurst for evermore be Hreidmar! Accurst  
 For evermore be Hreidmar's house!' he cried.  
 'Accurst be he who wears the Niblung's ring!  
 Accurst be he who holds the Niblung's gold!  
 May hate, disease, misfortunes dire, all ills  
 Conceivable, unutterable woe,  
 Tortures of mind and body, pursue the steps  
 Of him who wears the ring or holds the gold!  
 Curst be his lot until his dying day!  
 O woe! Woe! Woe! What now is life to me!  
 Lost is the Niblung's power without his ring!'

**XXXVII**

"But Hreidmar only laughed. 'Begone ye  
 knaves!  
 Free are ye one and all! And as for thee,  
 Impudent dwarf, I fear thy curses not.'

**XXXVIII**

"Thereafter went the gods upon their way  
 Rejoicing, and the Niblung sought his cave;  
 But Hreidmar gathered up the glittering gold,  
 And in the sacks re-stowed it, and beside  
 His treasure watched, sleepless, till morning  
 dawned.

**XXXIX**

"Then Fafnir huge, whose glowering face  
bespoke

Evil within, addressed our father thus:

'Meseems 'twere fairer, since three bags of gold  
The Niblung brought, that each of us one bag  
Take as his share, and not that all the gold  
To thee alone should go. Good sons are we,  
Trusty and strong; and had it not been for us,  
Regin and me, with our stout spears, methinks  
'Twould have gone hard with thee. Let us  
divide,

Therefore, the Niblung's gold into three parts,  
One part for each. What say'st thou, father  
mine?'

**XL**

"But Hreidmar answered curtly: 'I trow not.  
The gold is mine, and mine it shall remain.'

**XLI**

"Then Fafnir: 'Miser! Thy blood be on thy  
head!'

And straightway through our father's body he  
drove

His spear gigantic, and prone upon the floor,  
With a great cry, old Hreidmar tumbled,—  
dead.

## XLII

"Thus went into effect, without delay,  
The Niblung's Curse: like a malignant star,  
Launched into ether by demoniac hands,  
Henceforth to burn, casting its influence dire  
On all who wear the ring or hold the gold.

## XLIII

"And Fafnir pulled from his dead father's hand  
The Niblung's ring, and placed it on his own  
(A golden serpent with two ruby eyes),  
And—me, perchance, mistrusting—from the hut  
His treasure bore, seeking some safer spot;  
Till, wandering through the wood, he came at  
last  
(Led, peradventure, by some power occult)  
Unto the waterfall, and there sat down.  
And long he gloated o'er his glittering gold.  
And as he gazed upon the ring he kissed,  
Softly, the shining band; and straightway came  
From out the cavern's mouth the Niblung dwarf,  
Andvari, and knelt down upon the sand  
Low before Fafnir, crying 'What wouldest thou  
have?

Slaves of the ring are we, I and my gnomes.  
Whoso possesses that possesses us.  
A power unseen impels us though we strive  
Against its bidding. Whoso possesses us,

His is the Niblung's gold: that mighty hoard,  
Garnered through the centuries. If thou  
wouldst enjoy  
The glorious spectacle, enter and claim thine  
own.'

**XLIV**

"So saying, the dwarf arose; and, with both  
hands,

Pointed to the waterfall; then, bowing low,  
Strode toward the cavern's mouth; and Fafnir,  
filled

With wonder and greedy joy, him followed close.  
And when the son of Hreidmar saw the Hoard,  
Motley and vast, seemingly limitless,  
He laughed, and smote his hands together, and  
cried,

'Ah, luckiest mortal in the world am I!  
Here will I bide, amidst my glittering gold!'  
And there abode he; but, as passed the years,  
Slowly he changed from bad to worse, and grew  
Into a thing of horror, half man, half beast;  
And in the end a creature wholly beast  
Became, a dragon loathsome, hideous, fierce,  
Cruel and powerful, from whose scaly hide,  
Hard as wrought iron, the sharpest spear re-  
bounds,

All unavailing. And there abides he still.  
But I, within my father's hut, alone,  
Deep in the forest, dwelt for many a year.

**Andvari's Ring**

And later, from that sage of ancient days,  
 Mimer, the wisest man in all the North,  
 I learned the sword-smith's art. Then, as thou  
     knowest,  
 King Sigmund sought, and him served till he  
     died.  
 And now what thinkest thou of my story, lad?"

**XLV**

"Fafnir," I answered, "shall be Gram's first  
     meat.  
 What say'st thou, Master? Brother of thine  
     is he,  
 I know, but also murderer of thy sire.  
 Earth were well rid of him. Is it not so?  
 Thy silence gives approval, Master mine.  
 Today will I make ready for the fight;  
 Tomorrow will I face this monster; aye,  
 E'en in his lair. May Odin grant success!"

**XLVI**

"And wilt thou take the treasure and the ring  
 Attainted? Wilt thou brave the Niblung's  
     curse?"

**XLVII**

Thus Regin, and to him I made reply:  
 "I know not. What think'st thou? 'Twere  
     well, indeed.

To ponder this. Perchance, when comes the hour,

Odin my course will guide. Great plans have I,  
Master, for the future. Firstly, to avenge  
My father's death, and Hunding's sons destroy;  
And next, with ships and men to sally forth  
O'er the great ocean, distant lands to view.  
For these things gold were welcome—gold to  
buy

Stout galleys, gold to man them. Think'st thou  
not,

Master, that if this now attainted hoard  
Were put to uses good the curse might die?"

#### XLVIII

And Regin answered: "Aye, perchance it  
might;

And yet I fear 'twill not. Terrible to me  
It seems, this ancient curse, and fraught with  
ills

Unending. But my spirit fails with age,  
And ever doubtful and despondent grows;  
Fearful of all things, longing for life's end:  
Not like the buoyant soul that lives in thee,  
Bright as the sun of Easter-month and strong.  
Balder thou art, methinks, come back to earth;  
Balder, the springtime jubilant, whose face  
Fronts the inconstant future with a smile;  
Eager to breast the battle and the gale;

Eager to pit thyself against the world  
And try which be the stronger, it or thou.  
Balder thou art, but Hoder old am I,  
Hoder, the winter, white with deepening snows.  
Little I know, now at life's end; but if  
'Tis possible to bring the curse to naught  
Thy plan will do it: evil thwart with good.  
But let me end this tale, while yet my tongue  
Hath power of speech, for shadows of the  
grave

Beset me, and scarce comes my fleeting breath.  
Death's hand upon my stiffening limbs I feel.  
Methinks the end is near. List now, my lad!  
When I am gone search thou the smithy chest—  
A map thine eyes will find—the waterfall—  
The Niblung's cave—not far from here they lie.  
Easily to be reached when once the way is  
known.  
Go forth and do the deed. Long hath the world  
Waited for thee. May Odin guide thy hand!"

**XLIX**

So saying, from its earthly dwelling-place,  
Swiftly, with scarce a bodily tremor, passed  
The ghost of Regin; and as from the fields  
Rises the laverock to the azure sky  
Rejoicing; so, methinks, that noble soul,  
Leaving its worn-out garment, rose in air,  
Rejoicing to Valhalla, and there abides.

## L

But I—when near the smithy door these hands  
His withered frame had buried—my Master's  
words

Remembered, and sought out the ancient chest,  
And searched within its depths, and found the  
map,

E'en as his dying voice had bidden me. Lo!  
Traced on the yellow parchment, plotted with  
care,

The waterfall—the Niblung's cave! Not far  
From the old smithy was the spot, a scant  
League through the forest; easily to be reached  
When once the way was known. And in my  
hand

I grasped my father's weapon, Gram the Wrath,  
The gift of Odin, now, by Regin's skill  
Re-born for me; and, lifting him on high,  
I swore before the morrow's sun should set  
To slay the dragon or myself be slain.

## LI

Now when the moon had risen I wandered out  
Into the forest, and though my first intent  
Had been to sally forth at break of day  
On my adventure, fresh and strong from sleep,  
Yet ever toward the Niblung's cave my feet  
Moved, by a power resistless drawn, like steel

Drawn by the magnet, so that I, ere long,  
Had gone full half the distance. Suddenly, then,  
Before me, like a spectral shape, appeared,  
Right in my path standing, a figure strange.  
One-eyed he was and huge, a great slouched hat  
Betopped his golden locks, and a blue cloak  
Covered his shoulders. Not of earth he seemed,  
But mystic, superhuman. Such his mien  
Awe filled my bosom. Odin 'twas in truth.  
Quoth he: "Where goest thou, Sigurd?" I  
replied:

"Fafnir to slay." Then he: "And fear'st thou  
not  
To attempt the deed? Fafnir is strong and  
fierce,  
Cruel and terrible." "But I fear him not,"  
I cried. "Within my hand I hold the sword  
My father, Sigmund, from the old oak-tree  
Wrested; the gift of Odin, Gram the Wrath,  
Re-born through Regin's skill. Why should I  
fear

This dragon? Through his loathsome mail my  
blade,—

Magic, invincible,—will I thrust, and pierce  
His devil's heart. No! No! I fear him not!"  
Then Odin: "Worthy son of a brave sire  
Art thou, my lad: courage aye wins success.  
But list! Wait not until tomorrow dawns,  
But go tonight. Each morn comes Fafnir forth  
From out his lair, the Niblung's cavern vast,

To slake his thirst beside the waterfall.  
His trail thou wilt perceive in the soft sand.  
Dig thou tonight a pit, narrow and deep,  
Upon the trail, and stand within the pit,  
And when at break of day comes Fafnir forth  
And moves along his trail, and covers thee,  
Thrust upward with thy sword and pierce his  
heart.

Farewell.” So saying,—like a wraith that comes  
Out of the unknown, and shows itself, and then  
To the unknown returns,—he disappeared.

**LII**

So swiftly through the forest now I strode,  
My heart on fire, until the waterfall,  
White in the moonlight, did mine eyes behold.  
And to the stream below the fall I came,  
And searched upon the sand, and straightway  
found  
The dragon’s trail; and on the trail I dug,  
With my good sword, as Odin had bidden me,  
A pit, narrow and deep, then into the pit  
Got, sword in hand, and waited for the dawn.

**LIII**

Now at the earliest light came Fafnir forth,  
From out the Niblung’s cave, his thirst to slake;  
And as I stood within the pit my gaze

Followed his every motion. Huge his frame,  
Armoured with dusky scales: his upreared  
head

Helmeted like the basilisk's: his eye  
Malignant, like the basilisk's, and cold;  
Repulsive, as in every age hath been  
The eye of reptile, filling with strange fear,  
Horror inexplicable, the hearts of men.  
His giant jaws were partly open; his whole  
Saurian visage ruthless, terrible.

Along the earth his length ten fathoms stretched,  
Loathsome to look upon. A crocodile  
With wings, he looked, but huger; more, me-  
thinks,

Like some vast brute of earlier ages born.  
Out from his lair beneath the waterfall  
He passed, then, turning, down along the stream  
Pursued his sluggish course. Hideous the  
sight!

But I, e'en when he neared me, felt no fear.  
And as his carcass lumbered o'er the pit,  
And sudden darkness filled the narrow space,  
Up through his yellow under-hide I drove  
Gram to his heart. Forth, like a river, rushed  
The dragon's blood; and me from head to foot  
In liquid blackness bathed. (For black as  
night

Was Fafnir's blood, compound of evils gross.)  
Then from the pit I clomb, and drew the steel  
From out the monster, who me thus addressed:

## LIV

“What man art thou whose crafty thrust hath  
drawn  
My life-blood? And what purpose moved thy  
heart?  
Unknown thou art to me, unharmed by me.  
Whence comest thou? Who hath urged thee  
to this deed?”

## LV

Then I: “Fafnir, thou knowest me not: but  
thee  
I know. A monster execrable. Right soon  
Dead wilt thou be through bite of my good  
sword.  
Without thee earth were happier. But methinks  
Upon thy claw a glittering ring I see—  
A golden serpent with two ruby eyes.  
That will I take. All else of thee may rot.”

## LVI

Then Fafnir: “”Tis the Niblung’s ring. A curse  
Goes with it. Dost thou know the evil tale?”

## LVII

“The tale I know, but nathless will I take  
The ring and wear it. The Niblung’s gold I  
need.”

So saying, from the dragon's claw I drew  
The glittering band that rules Andvari's hoard.

**LVIII**

"May the curse blast thee!" Fafnir screamed  
—then died.

**LIX**

Then from the cave came forth the Niblung dwarf,  
Andvari, and beheld the dragon dead;  
Though weltering still in his black blood, as worms,  
Both great and small, are wont to do when slain.  
And on his knees, before me, fell the dwarf,  
Crying, "Hail Master! Wearer of the Ring!  
Whoso possesses that, possesses us—  
Custodians of the Hoard. What wouldest thou have?

Immeasurable wealth is thine. Behold  
The Niblung's cave! Enter and claim thine own."

And straightway (following the dwarf, who rose  
And went before me) toward the waterfall  
I strode and, passing underneath the force,  
Entered the narrow portal of the cave.  
And thereupon my wondering eyes beheld,  
E'en as my Master's words had pictured it,

The chamber vast wherein the Niblungs dwell.  
And from it dusky corridors branched out,  
Leading to other chambers underground.  
And everywhere swart Niblungs, grimy gnomes,  
Mine eyes encountered: bags of treasure some  
Carried to and fro, and others at the forge  
Wrought, and yet others in deep galleries toiled  
With pick and shovel—all on labour bent,  
Labour unending. And Andvari cried,  
“Master, here shalt thou dwell and be our chief;  
Reigning, like Fafnir, over limitless wealth!”

## LX

But I the crafty Niblung thus bespoke:  
“Thy gloomy halls, Andvari, charm me not.  
Rather, for me, the open air, the sun,  
The moon, the stars, the forest and the sea.  
Nathless, great projects for the future years  
I've planned, and for their fit accomplishment  
This wealth is needed. Therefore bid thy  
gnomes  
Three sacks of gold make ready, and through the  
wood,  
Straightway to Regin's smithy carry them.  
Anon, perhaps, more treasure will I need  
My plans to prosper; therefore be prepared.  
Like the young eagle doth my spirit burn  
To spread its wings, not underneath the ground  
To burrow like the mole. Dost understand,

Niblung? Remain thou here, my vassal true,  
Custodian of the Hoard; remain and wait  
My coming. Be thou regent here for me,  
Sigurd, thy master, who doth wear the ring."

**LXI**

And low Andvari bowed, and answered: "Aye,  
My master, well I'll guard the Hoard." Then  
cried:

"Ho slaves! Three bags of gold!" And  
straightway rushed

Three Niblung gnomes, and seized the bags,  
and them

Fetched to their master. And Andvari said:  
"Here is the gold, my lord." And I replied:  
"Let us away!" At once, upon his back  
Each gnome a bag of treasure swung, and then—  
They following me—we passed out of the cave,  
And thence to Regin's ancient smithy came.

Here did the gnomes their treasure leave, and  
then

Straightway unto the Niblung's cave returned.

**LXII**

Thereafter did I seek a seaport old,  
Not far away, famed as a rendezvous  
Of fisherfolk and vikings; and here bought  
Three galleys good and them o'erhauled and  
named

The *Dragon*, *Wolf*, and *Bear*, and for the prow  
Of each the shipwrights carved a figurehead  
In keeping with the name, and gilded it,  
And fair they were to see. (E'en those thine  
eyes

Beheld this morn.) And then for each I shipped  
A crew of lusty lads, all ocean-bred,  
Skilful with oar and canvas, sword and spear,  
Vikings who loved, like me, the wanderer's life.  
And when to snow-clad earth once more returned  
Bright Balder, and unlocked the frozen streams,  
And lifted from the world its mantle white,  
And spread o'er land and sea his prospering airs,  
I to avenge my father's death set out.

And up the coast of Norroway we sailed  
Unto that land where Hunding once did rule.  
Long since was Hunding dead, but o'er the land  
Still ruled his breed, two cruel sons and false,  
Lyngi and Horward; and upon their coasts  
Falling, fierce as the famished wolf, by night,  
We caught them unawares, at wassail, and slew  
All but a handful of their men-at-arms,  
And left the banquet hall a blazing pyre.  
And at the last the two kings turned to fly,  
Craven, but I faced them in their flight and  
cried:

"Be men, not swine! Sigurd am I, the son  
Of Sigmund, whom your father foully slew.  
Prepare to die!" And Lyngi, the elder, raised  
His sword to strike, but ere he struck, fell Gram,

Swiftly descending, upon his helm, and clove  
Helmet and head and mail-clad body in twain.  
And on the ground the two halves fell apart.  
And Horward, likewise, did Gram cleave in  
twain,

E'en as he turned to fly. Then from the land  
Of Hunding's sons I passed,—my father's death  
Avenged,—and that fair territory sought  
Which Hunding from my noble sire did wrest—  
That spot beloved where first the light of earth  
My infant eyes beheld. Gone was the home  
Where Sigmund once and sweet Siglinda dwelt—  
That noble hall my grandsire, Volsung, built,  
Up through whose roof the mighty oak-tree  
soared,

Branstock, and bloomed within the outer air:  
That hall where once the bearded heroes sat  
Drinking, with lightsome hearts, the nut-brown  
ale;

While on the lofty wall each glittering shield  
Hung idle, flanked by battle-axe and spear;  
That hall to which, amidst the wassail, came  
The one-eyed stranger with the unsheathed  
sword,

Odin, and silent stalked across the room,  
And into Branstock plunged the glittering blade.  
Gone was that noble hall, by Hunding's hand  
Fired on that midnight twice seven years before,  
When fell my father and my mother fled,  
As flies the stricken deer, to Regin's forge.

Gone was my childhood's home, and, as I  
walked

About the blackened spot where once it stood  
Tears filled my eyes. Then, from afar and near,  
Hearing of my return whom they thought dead,  
Came, in the months which followed, henchmen  
old,

Who for my father oft had borne the spear.  
And these, and many others, me besought  
Henceforth to abide with them and rule the land.  
And for a time I tarried and, perchance,  
Better had it been if I had there remained,  
Ruling the kingdom which my father ruled.  
But evermore the call of the great world,  
In accents irresistible, I heard—  
Sweet voices from beyond our boreal seas,  
Voices from out the magic realms of Rome,  
Singing of ampler knowledge, higher arts  
Of nobler manners and a fuller life;  
Singing a land by Nature's kindest smile  
Illumined, of all earth the garden spot;  
A fair domain in which the Midland Sea  
Lay like a sapphire in a golden brooch;  
A land enchanted, where the stately walls  
Of villas and of palaces uprose  
Innumerable, by gardens fair begirt,  
Under whose bosky shade pale statues stood;  
Singing a nation proud and puissant, dam  
Of valiant sons, who to their mother's knee  
The treasures of remotest earth had brought;

Singing a realm ruled from the Tiber's banks;  
A peaceful land by warriors' spears upheld;  
An ordered state where safe was each one's life;  
An empire splendid as the midday sun,  
Within whose bounds the mind of man had  
reached

Its highest, and his hand had wrought its best,  
And which, like the great sun, did radiate  
Upon our earth its light beneficent.

This and yet more the voices sang to me,  
Till on my spirit a wild wander-lust  
Seized, and dissatisfied were all my days.  
So in my place a kinsman strong and true,  
In whom the blood of Volsung likewise ran,  
Thorwald, surnamed The Incorruptible,  
I left as ruler of the little state,  
And for a cruise began to make prepare  
Long and uncertain. Stores my ships required.

And of the mariners who with me sailed  
Against the sons of Hunding some were slain  
And others, having wife and bairn, perchance,  
Loved not so long a voyage, so with men  
From my own land the vacancies I filled,  
Till every ship her complement contained—  
Some youngsters like myself, old sea-dogs some,  
Greybeards who had my father Sigmund served,  
And loved the son because the sire they loved.  
And for the *Wolf* and *Bear* captains I chose,  
Strong men by nature fitted for command.  
Eric the Wanderer one, who on the deep

Was born, and all his life upon the deep  
Had dwelt, till scarce he knew 'the touch of  
earth:

To him the *Wolf* I gave. And to the *Bear*  
Hakon the son of Haldan I assigned.  
A man of temper fierce, yet wise withal,  
Intrepid, yet a cautious counsellor.  
And of the largest vessel of the three,  
The *Dragon*, I myself assumed command.

## LXIII

Then set we sail once more, with eager hearts,  
And, bearing westward, sought the famous isle  
Of Britain, where till late the Roman ruled.  
And first the foggy Shetlands we beheld,  
And landed, and Norse rovers like ourselves  
Everywhere found, on wild adventure bent,  
Hovering like ospreys ere they strike their prey.  
Thence to the Orkneys southerly we sailed,  
And likewise here the ships of Northland found,  
For springtime 'twas, and every viking bold  
His summer cruise was planning, and in dreams  
Himself beheld returning to his home—  
What time the autumn's briefer days are come—  
With galleys laden to the water's edge,  
Silver and gold and splendid booty his.  
Then down the rocky Caledonian coast  
We made our way until that famous wall  
Which Roman Hadrian built against the Picts

We reached, and here a while on shore I stayed,  
That I might view this marvel of men's hands.  
From ocean unto ocean it extends,  
From far Ituna on the western shore  
To Segedunum on the east, where falls  
The river Tyne into the Northern sea.  
Aye, fourscore miles, o'er hill and dale and  
plain,—

Rising and falling with the varied land—  
It stretches, like some sleeping serpent vast.  
Built is't of stone, with ample fosse in front;  
So broad its top that, at the narrowest parts,  
Three men with shields and spears can walk  
abreast;  
And all along that top a line of towers—  
Endless unto the eye it seems—stands guard;  
And all along behind the wall great camps,  
Cities more like, at intervals are reared.  
Here, till of late, the Roman stood on guard  
Northernmost outpost of his empire vast.  
A wondrous sight it was to me, this wall,  
To me whose eyes, though hoping to behold  
Earth's greatest works, perchance e'en Rome  
itself,

Had seen, as yet, naught but the wilderness,  
Grey ocean, and the mountains of the North.  
A wondrous sight it is, though swift decay  
Already hath begun to sap its strength.  
For Rome, today, is not what she hath been,  
And hath abandoned Britain to its fate,

And so, perforce, neglected stands the wall.  
And in that distant island where once reigned  
Law, and secure were property and life,  
And years of peace had brought prosperity,  
Confusion now, low crime and rapine rule;  
And like a wife left husbandless, who stands  
Alone and unprotected, is the land,  
Bereft of the strong shelter of Rome's arm.

## LXIV

Now once more to the southward did we steer,  
Skirting the rugged coast, till Humber's mouth  
We reached and entered and, as in the isles  
Of Orkney and of Shetland, here we found  
The Norsemen's ships, aye, everywhere we  
went,  
In port or on the wing, they seemed to be,  
With broidered sails and golden figureheads  
Glittering in the sunshine, and the warriors'  
shields,  
When o'er the deep they journeyed, outboard  
hung  
Along the gunwales. And to me the thought  
Came, and hath lingered with me ever since,  
That, as the Roman hath this favoured isle  
Abandoned to its fate, to sink or swim,  
Perchance 'twill be the Norseman's destiny  
To people and to rule it, and, in truth,  
A land well suited is it to our race.

## LXV

Then down the coast once more we sailed away,  
Past many a headland bold and harbour snug,  
Until at last the mouth of Thames we reached.  
And here I should have entered—for my plan  
Was and still is, at future day, to see  
Londinium, of all British towns the chief,  
The largest and the richest in the isle,—  
But learning that unfriendly were the folk,  
And being—though my vikings scoffed at fear—  
Not overstrong in ships and men, I deemed  
Prudence the part of wisdom and forebore.  
Then hearing praise of Burgundy and thee,  
And longing to behold the river Rhine,  
I bade farewell to Britain's foggy land.  
Thence borne along by favourable winds,  
We toward the Frisian coast our galleys' heads  
Turned, and that level region sighted soon—  
Low as the ocean—where, through many a  
mouth,  
Rhine's waters pass into the Northern sea.  
And by that mouth we entered where doth lie  
Batavia's famous isle—Batavian once,  
Then Roman and now Frank—but showing still,  
In many a solid road and well-built wall,  
And many a fortress fashioned with all skill,  
Strongest the impress of Rome's master hand,  
For Rome doth ever build to last for aye.  
A noted spot hath always been this land.

Right at Rhine's mouth. Here, from the gloomy depths

Of the Hercynian Forest came, at first,  
The fierce Batavi and upon this isle  
Founded a habitation and a home;  
Here, later, by that sibyl fair inflamed  
Bructerian, who within the dark tower dwelt,  
Civilis, chafing from his chains unjust,  
Marshaled his doughty clans and fought with  
Rome;

And here his fleet the son of Drusus formed,  
Wherewith to bear his legions to the Elbe,  
And subjugate the warlike Teuton land—  
A task e'en for Germanicus too great,  
For though in battle thrice his foes he drove  
Before him, yet unconquered was the land,  
And hath remained so till this very day.

But let me to my narrative return.

O'er all this low Rhine country now doth rule  
(As well ye know, Burgundians, whose domain  
Borders upon his own) a Frankish king,  
Wise Merovæus, son of Clodion. Him  
Haply I met, and friendly were his words,  
Bidding me tarry long within his realm,  
Or up the Rhine proceed with ships and  
men,

As my convenience suited. And although  
Pleasant it would have been to linger there  
Tasting the welcome of our new-found friends,  
The wanderer's heart within me drove me on.

**LXVI**

So set we forth once more, 'twixt fertile shores  
Steering, low as the wave, until, at last,  
From out that hollow land of dune and dyke  
Emerging, we to loftier regions came.  
And as our little fleet the noble stream  
Ascended slow, day after day my eyes  
Some thought-compelling spectacle beheld.  
For on our right, with many a tower and town,  
Was Rome, or what was once the Roman realm,  
And on our left the peoples of the North.  
And oft upon the future of this land  
I mused, and wondered whether e'er again  
Would Rome her pristine puissance regain,  
Or whether here the peoples of the North—  
Thy race and mine, O king,—should henceforth  
rule.  
And to my mind it seemed that Rome must  
pass,  
That her all-conquering arm must some time fail,  
And her illumining sun must some time sink;  
And, after night, another sun must rise,  
Another day must dawn upon the earth,  
Another race must rule these hills and streams,  
Perchance the fair-haired children of the North.  
For such is Nature's way. Empires like men  
Grow old and die, and in their place new  
states,  
Like generations new of men, arise.

## LXVII

Thus musing, day by day, at last I came  
Unto thy realm, here royal welcome found,  
And now join with thee at this festal board  
To celebrate the auspicious hour wherein,  
Seven years ago, thy happy reign began.

*End of Sigurd's Narrative*

## LXVIII

He ceased; and round the mighty table ran  
The applause of many hands; and from the lips  
Of knights and ladies who, erstwhile, had sat  
Rapt listeners, words of warm approval rose.  
The buzz of many voices filled the air.  
Then Gunter thus: “A gallant tale well told.  
Methinks our brother of the North was born  
A warrior and a saga-man in one.  
Like the first Cæsar, whom our fathers fought,  
The mighty Julius, well he tells his deeds.  
We thank him one and all. But let us not  
Him weary with a feast too long drawn out,  
For after travel nature craves repose.  
One parting cup we'll have, and then goodnight.”

## LXIX

So saying, from his seat he rose and stood,  
Six feet of kingliness, before his guests;

Then, lifting high in air his golden cup,  
Studded with precious stones, and crying, "Sir  
Knights,  
Here's to the ladies! Our sweethearts and our  
wives,  
Our mothers and our sisters! Here's to all!"  
He set the beaker to his bearded lips  
And quaffed, to the last drop, the ruddy wine.  
And likewise did the knights with one accord  
Rise, at the selfsame moment as the king,  
And, standing with uplifted goblets, cry  
"The Ladies," and drink down the good red  
wine.  
And on the hand of Sigurd, as he held  
His cup aloft and quaffed the ruddy draught,  
Was seen, by those near by, the jewel rare  
Whereof his lips had spoken: the Niblung's  
ring,  
A golden serpent with two ruby eyes,  
Shining, with baleful light, beneath the lamps.

## IV

### THE TOURNAMENT

#### I

Now, that he might still further celebrate  
His coronation's anniversary, and  
Still further entertain his Northland guests,  
Gunter proclaimed a day for manly sports—  
Contests of strength and skill: athletic feats  
And martial exercises manifold,  
Such as all vikings love, for Sigurd's men:  
For the Burgundian knights a tournament.

#### II

Bright rose the summer sun above the Rhine,  
Blazoning the river and the plain beyond,  
Filled, on this morning of the tournament,  
Already with a concourse of brave knights.  
Here, in a spacious meadow, smooth and green,  
Betwixt the city and the forest set,  
Were placed the lists. Here, on the close-cut  
sward,

In shape a giant crescent, gay with flags,  
Rose the pavilion of the king. And here,  
Arrayed in gala-day apparel, drest  
In gowns of every colour, reigned The Fair—  
The dames and damosels of Gunter's court,  
The flowers of Burgundy, high o'er the lists  
Sitting, sweet umpires of the deeds of men.  
Here, of the fair the fairest, sat Gudrun.

**III**

Now, when all things were ready, the heralds  
blew  
Their horns; and Sigurd's sailors on the green  
Appeared, guests of the king, and therefore first  
To show their prowess on the listed field.

**IV**

Running and wrestling matches then were seen;  
Throwing the hammer, vaulting with the pole;  
The tug of war, wherein the brawny crews  
Of Sigurd's ships against each other strove.  
And then the archer's skill the throng engrossed,  
And fencing bouts, and casting the swift spear,  
And other warlike exercises. All  
Of these the crowd beheld with keen delight,  
Greeting with many a cheer or loud "Well done!"  
The winners of each trial of strength or skill.

## V

Next comes the chief event, the tournament,  
Wherein two parties of Burgundian knights  
Strive for the victory. Gathered on each side  
Of the great meadow now, impatiently,  
The signal they await. And first a blast  
Preparative the heralds sound, and straight  
The turnpikes of the lists are opened wide,  
And on the level field the knights debouch,  
Gay, clad in glittering mail, a gallant sight,  
Each with his lady's favour round his helm  
Fastened, or from left shoulder hanging free.  
One party in the north end of the field  
Ranges, in the south the other. The heralds next  
A second signal give, and thereupon  
Each cavalier his spear and shield doth dress  
And everything makes ready. Now, at the third  
Blast of the trumpets, lo, they're off! The  
knights

Put spurs to their good steeds and o'er the field  
Against their adversaries ride full tilt.  
The meadow, beaten by tempestuous hoofs,  
Trembles as in an earthquake; while the din  
Of charging squadrons fills the expectant air.  
(Ah, wildly flutters now each maiden's heart!)  
As two great ocean surges sometimes rush  
Against each other, driven by contrary winds,  
So rush these rival companies of knights  
Each against other and, meeting in midfield,

Shock, with a sound like distant thunder, or  
The boom of the swift surf upon the shore.  
And many a broken lance flew up in air,  
And many a lusty knight to earth was thrown,  
And wildly did the crowd the victors cheer.

## VI

Then spoke King Gunter unto Sigurd thus:  
“Wouldst like, Sir Knight, to try a tilt? Al-  
though  
Unused thou art to our Burgundian ways,  
Gallantly I know thou wouldest acquit thyself.”

## VII

And Sigurd answered: “Knightly tournament  
Ne'er have mine eyes beheld until this hour.  
Yet from my boyhood to bestride a horse  
Hath been my keen delight; that, and to ride  
The restless waves of ocean, the untamed steeds  
Of the wild waste of waters. The horseman's  
skill,

Therefore, is mine already, perchance some touch  
Of the tourney's art, all unknown to myself,  
May come to me as down the lists I ride  
Against mine adversary, and I, the esquire,  
May tilt the knight. Yet, if I be o'erthrown,  
What matter? 'Tis but the sport of a summer's  
day,

And wiser for the lesson shall I be.”

## VIII

Then Gunter: "Thou dost speak like a true knight.

Our Hagen here will try a tilt with thee,  
The captain of my men-at-arms, the best  
Lance in all Burgundy. Come, Hagen, show  
Our sailor guest how Rhinelanders can joust."

## IX

And Hagen, grim, black-bearded, with great frame

Teutonic, saying, "Thy wish is law, my king,"  
Stepped down into the lists, and soon appeared  
Armed cap-a-pie, ready for the mimic fray.

## X

Then yet again spoke Gunter to his guest:  
"Take thou my charger, and my tilting lance,  
Gauntlets and shield, for thine own arms, fair knight,

Are all too serious for our sportful jousts.  
'Tis but mock combat. And if thou wouldest wear

Favour of some sweet lady in the lists,  
As doth beseem knight young and comely, lo,  
Choose from yon bunch of beauties!" So saying,  
he glanced

Upward to where, a lily in the midst  
 Of clustering roses, sat the fair Gudrun,  
 Begirt by the twelve damsels of her bower.

## XI

And Sigurd: “If it be not overbold,  
 Sire, to thus voice the verdict of my eyes,  
 This wise my thought doth run:—above, below,  
 To right, to left, nothing so beautiful  
 As the fair Princess of the realm I see;  
 Gudrun, the lily maid of Burgundy.  
 Her favour, thou being willing, I fain would  
 wear.”

## XII

Then, by her brother bidden, down stept Gudrun  
 From that array of beauty, and round the arm  
 Of Sigurd bound her favour, a blue sleeve  
 Broidered with golden lilies. And as she bound  
 Deftly the sleeve she murmured, “Thou, Sir  
 Knight,  
 My champion art”; and Sigurd answered low,  
 “Princess, with this, thy token, round mine  
 arm,  
 Methinks I could o’erwhelm a world of men.”

## XIII

And Sigurd the king’s charger mounted and took  
 His tilting lance and shield and gauntlets e’en

As Gunter him had bidden; and to the north  
End of the spacious meadow rode and there  
Waited the signal. And Hagen in the south  
His station took, and silent there abode,  
Motionless, gigantic, like some towering shape  
Equestrian, by the sculptor wrought of bronze.  
And Sigurd's horse was snow-white, but the  
steed

Of Hagen black as midnight was. And thrice  
The trumpets blew, and at the third blast the  
knights—

Sunshine against shadow—moved to the assault.

### XIV

And Sigurd dressed his shield and couched his  
spear

And, putting spurs to his horse, dashed down the  
field

Like a whirlwind: and the blue sleeve of Gudrun,  
Made fast near his left shoulder, backward  
streamed

Like pennant in the gale, beheld of all,  
Her favour. And full tilt at Hagen he rode,  
And in the midst of his defences struck  
The Burgundian knight. And Hagen, by the  
shock

Lifted from out his saddle and backward borne,  
Reeled o'er the crupper of his horse, and fell  
Half a spear's length behind. And on the  
sward,

Stunned by the fall, all motionless, he lay,  
Seemingly dead. And silent the people sat  
At sight of their great champion overthrown.  
But Gunter cried: "Well done, Sigurd!" And  
the crowd,  
Hearing the king's voice, broke forth into  
cheers.

**xv**

Then came attendants out and Hagen bore,  
Half-conscious, from the lists; and led away  
The sable charger, whinnying for his lord.  
And thus, that day, the sports came to an end.

**xvi**

And Sigurd, dreaming of Gudrun, forgot—  
Or but remembered as light sport—his joust  
With Hagen; but the dark Burgundian knight,  
Being vanquished, forgot not his vanquishment;  
And, brooding ever o'er the event, hot rage  
Against his vanquisher turned to hatred cold,  
Which, like a venomous serpent, dwelt concealed  
Within his breast, waiting its time to strike.

## V

### SIGURD AND GUDRUN

#### I

WITHIN her bower the lily maid Gudrun  
Sat with her damsels twelve and with deft hands  
Rich hangings for the palace walls they wrought.  
And of these hangings there were seven, and  
each

The fair presentment of a deity  
Bore on its front, in divers coloured threads  
Embroidered. The Supernal Powers they were  
To whom the seven days of every week  
Are sacred. Them upon the costly cloth  
The damsels wrought in gorgeous colourings.

#### II

Now as they worked came Sigurd to the bower  
And looked within, and him Gudrun beheld  
And, smiling, cried, "Enter, my lord. Today  
We maidens toil upon a mighty task.  
These seven hangings for the banquet hall

We fain would finish. For a year and more  
 Them have we worked upon; but now, at last,  
 Methinks they're nearly done. Behold, my  
 lord!

Knowest thou these ancient deities for whom  
 The seven days of every week are named?"

## III

And Sigurd answered, "Aye, I know them well."  
 Then, gazing on the broderies, each in turn,  
 While to his words the lily maid Gudrun  
 And all her damsels twelve, a lovely sight,  
 Listened with rapt attention, thus he spake.

## IV

"Behold, of all the first, the golden Sun  
 Shining upon this lofty mountain top!  
 The source of light! The eye of Odin great!  
 All vivifying—all sustaining Power!  
 Him do we honour on the week's first day,  
 Him do we praise. For what were this dark  
 earth  
 Without his light—thrice blessed, heavenly light?  
 E'en as the halls of Hela cold, where dwell  
 The spirits of the wicked ones, would be  
 This world of ours without his glorious lamp!"

## V

"Next comes Our Lady of the silver moon.  
 Her do we honour on the second day.

Well have ye done, fair maids, to paint her  
thus—

Shining at night upon the tranquil sea,  
Smiling, perchance, upon the mariner  
As homeward to his heart's desire he goes—  
His heart's desire who in her bower doth sit,  
Gazing at Luna and her lane of light,  
And longing for her lover in her arms.  
Ah Moon, fair Moon, how beautiful thou art!

## VI

“But what a change when to the week's third  
day  
We come! Behold, equipped with helm and  
spear  
And byrnies bright, the one-armed god of war,  
Brave Tyr, whose missing limb the Fenris Wolf  
Tore off, in fury, at the elbow joint!  
A bright exemplar for us all is Tyr.  
Him must we follow, ladies fair, we men,  
And for our wives and bairns and country dear,  
If so the Fates decree, give limb or life.  
So did god Tyr. So ever do the brave.

## VII

“What noble shape, all-puissant, have we here?  
Puissant yet sad. The fourth day of the week.  
In honour of great Odin is it named:

Father of gods and men; of heaven and earth  
The ruler. E'en the realms beneath the earth,  
Where the grim goddess Hela doth pursue  
With lashes punitive, for all their crimes,  
The evil spirits of the underworld,  
His sway acknowledge; and old ocean's king,  
The green-haired Ægir, doth salute him lord.  
Only the pallid Norns do him defy.

The sisters three of Fate, who sit far off,  
Outside of Time, and the beginning see  
Of all this earthly pageant and the end.  
Above the plains of Ida and the homes  
Of all the gods they dwell, these mystic ones,  
Spinning the thread of life, inscrutable.  
Of aspect beautiful, methinks, are they,  
And yet unpitying, suited to their task;  
For though with prayer and sacrifice we seek  
To turn them from their purpose, 'tis in vain—  
Nor man nor god can change their dread decrees.  
E'en as a maiden from the flax doth spin  
A golden thread and, for a moment's space,  
Gazes upon it, gently handling it,  
Then cuts the thread to its allotted length;  
So do these sisters three the thread of life  
Draw forth from out the unknown and, for a  
space  
Smiling upon it, cut it to its length.  
But to this fair presentment let's return—  
This figure of the father of the gods.  
Upon his throne in Asgard here he sits,

Gazing, perchance, upon the world below.  
He holds within his hand a mighty spear.  
His ravens twain, Hugin and Munin wise,  
Sedately perch upon the high-backed seat;  
While on the floor his fierce and faithful wolves  
Crouch, like great dogs, beside the monarch's  
feet.

A noble broidery this, fair demoiselles,  
Well suited to the palace of a king.

### VIII

"Red-bearded Thor, whose golden chariot leaps  
From cloud to cloud, by goats impetuous  
drawn,  
What time in guise of summer shower he comes,  
While heaven re-echoes with his rumbling wheels  
And trembles in affright the deluged earth—  
Red-bearded Thor, girt with the belt of strength,  
Wearing the gloves of steel wherewith he hurls  
Miolnir, his mighty hammer, which returns  
Ever when thrown, into its master's hand—  
Red-bearded Thor, blustering but well-belov'd,  
The idol of each Norseman's heart—to him  
We give all honour on the week's fifth day!  
Behold him now! See how he Miolnir throws!  
The lightning 'tis which from the swollen cloud  
Darts to the earth. Almost, methinks, we  
hear  
The roar and rumble of his chariot wheels.

**IX**

“What lovely shape is this? ‘Tis Freya fair!  
She who in Greece was Aphrodite called—  
Venus in Rome. Goddess of Love is she,  
Sprung from the foam, child of the surging deeps,  
Forever young, forever beautiful!

So we have her all other things are naught,  
Who doth bestow on men the joys of heaven.  
Behold her here, wearing that necklace rare  
Of diamonds fashioned by the mountain dwarfs!  
In this fair chariot, drawn by cats, she rides  
O'er all the world. The sixth day of the week  
To her is sacred. So these broideries say.  
But any day, methinks, we'd welcome her  
Who lights within our hearts the flame divine.  
What think you ladies? Ah, your blushes deep  
Disclose the hidden promptings of the soul.

**X**

“Old Saturn, eldest of the gods of Rome,  
Him have we last. To him the seventh day  
Is dedicated. Here we see him stand,  
Holding within his hand a pruning knife,  
Who first taught agriculture and the arts  
In ancient Italy. The golden days  
Were his when plenty filled the fruitful land  
And war was not—the old Saturnian Age.  
Roman, not Scandian, was this ancient god;

But he so well-beloved was, I trow,  
That men cared never to forget his name.”

## xi

Earl Sigurd ceased. Then thus the fair Gudrun:  
“Thanks noble lord. So erudite thou art  
We maids, sometimes, could scarcely follow  
thee.

Yet did we understand, as women do,  
That what thou saidst was ever true and wise.  
Thrice valued now these broideries fair will be  
Since thou so eloquently hast rehearsed  
The story and significance of each.”

## xii

To whom Earl Sigurd, “Nay, my Princess, nay.  
Thou must not flatter me. Yet if to thee  
It seem that I have earned, by my discourse,  
Some favour at thy hands, I’ll name it straight.  
What sayst thou to a ramble by old Rhine?  
Never, since first I knew him, have appeared  
So beautiful his waters as this eve.  
See how they shine, lit by the setting sun,  
Which soon behind yon mighty forest wall  
Will disappear, bidding adieu to earth.  
Soon falls the summer twilight on the world—  
The magic summer twilight long and sweet.  
The air is cool and pleasant. Wilt thou go?”

## XIII

And smiled Gudrun and answered, "Aye, my lord."

And out across the meadows went the twain,  
Leaving within the bower the damsels twelve.  
And up the path beside the golden Rhine,  
They wandered, while the day to twilight turned,  
And overhead, among the branches, sang  
The sweet-voiced birds their evening roundelay.

## XIV

Sometimes, in this too fickle world, we see  
A youth and maiden to their hearts' first choice  
Constant, none other loving from that hour  
When first they meet till death doth part them.

So

Chances it now with Sigurd and Gudrun.  
Love at first sight: true love without a break  
Till death doth part them. Thus it is sometimes.

## VI

### IN THE ODENWALD

#### I

Now, as they hunted in the Odenwald  
One day, King Gunter to Earl Sigurd thus:

#### II

“Dost thou remember the adventure bold  
Whereof I spoke when first we met? Since then  
Naught of the matter have my lips disclosed  
To thee, though near my heart it lies; but now,  
Today, as through the forest’s depths we ride,  
Meseems my spirit would divulge itself.  
List to my tale and tell me then thy thought.

#### III

“Far off, in the great northern ocean, lies  
A sacred island, Helgoland; of gods  
And goddesses a trysting place; a haunt  
Beloved of Odin. Here, upon a rock,

Circled by fire (so sing the ancient skalds),  
Sleeps Brynhild, Odin's daughter fair, erstwhile  
A valkyr, now, for some rash, wilful act  
Of disobedience to her sire divine,  
Condemned by him to everlasting sleep.  
Yet did the All-Father this one daughter love  
More than all other of his children. Woe  
Filled, when he banished her, his mighty heart.  
And thus he tempered, so, at least, 'tis said,  
His mandate of perpetual slumber. If  
Among earth's heroes could be found a man  
Fearless enough and skilful to essay  
Successfully the wall of fire and gain  
The rock within, fair Brynhild should be his.  
Thus runs the story, and for many a year  
My heart hath brooded o'er it. Dost thou  
think,  
Sigurd, 'tis true, or but a poet's dream?"

**IV**

And Sigurd answered: "Sire, methinks 'tis  
true.  
Myself an hundred times have heard the tale.  
And in that seaport old, upon the coast  
Of Norway, where I my galleys bought,  
A chart I saw which to an ancient man  
Belonged, who all his life upon the deep  
Had dwelt, half trader and half pirate red.  
A chart of that low region where the Rhine

Empties, through many a mouth, into the sea;  
And Frisia's coast, with sandy isles befringed;  
And farther east, that land of fen and fiord  
Which, jutting into ocean, northward runs  
For many a misty league (in shape, methinks,  
Like upcurled prow of some war-galley huge  
Breasting the North Sea's waves); that land yclept  
By Rome the Cimbric Chersonese, where dwell  
Angles and Jutlanders and Saxons bold.  
And on this chart was plotted Helgoland,  
The sacred island. He, himself, ofttimes,  
Slow-sailing by (at least so, volubly,  
Maintained this ancient mariner), had beheld,  
Especially at night, the magic fire  
Circling the lonely cliff. And I the chart  
Purchased, thereafter, for a silver cup—  
Part of the Niblung's Hoard—and still possess.  
For ere I came to this Burgundian land  
My purpose 'twas to explore the sacred isle.  
Now, as thou knowest, except the lily maid  
Gudrun, no goddess fair do I desire."

## V

At this the king smiled slightly, then went on:  
"Oft hath my spirit longed to make the attempt,  
And win the child of Odin for my bride.  
Methinks her imprisoned soul aye beckons me  
From out that ring of flame. But I—to leave  
My kingdom and upon that wild emprise

To embark? To go upon a quest for what—  
 A maid? 'Tis passing difficult. Peoples bold—  
 Goths, Vandals, Franks—surround me. Far in  
 the east,

Beside the Danube, gather the restless hordes  
 Of Attila the Hun, like tempest fierce  
 Soon to affright the earth. And in the south  
 Rome, slowly dying, lies; a lion old  
 Beset by hungry wolves; a conqueror once,  
 Defenceless now. War, everywhere 'tis war!  
 Is't not so, Sigurd? My duty lies at home;  
 At least, to me so seems it. To safeguard  
 His kingdom is the king's first task, and ne'er  
 Should private joys outweigh the public weal.  
 Alas, fair Brynhild, daughter of the gods,  
 Thou callst to me in vain! 'Tis but a dream!"

**VI**

Then Sigurd: "Sire, can I not serve thee?  
 Well  
 Thou knowest whate'er I can I'll gladly do."

**VII**

And Gunter answered: "Aye, if thou wilt,  
 thou canst.  
 Thou, Sigurd, thou art free. Already thou  
 Hast left thy father's land and roamst to and fro  
 Unhampered. Like the eagle's thy strong flight

No boundaries knows. Go thou upon the quest;  
I'll trust thee; and bring back the valkyr maid  
To Burgundy. Hagen I'll send along;  
In peril's hour, perchance, thy life he'll keep.  
A tower of strength thou'l find him. For  
reward

Take thou the lily maiden of our realm,  
Gudrun. Methinks thine eyes have found her  
fair.

Two weddings will we have on thy return—  
Brynhild and Gunter, Sigurd and Gudrun.  
What sayest thou to my project, brother mine?"

**VIII**

And Sigurd, loath to leave Gudrun, but joyed  
By this adventure bold to win his bride,  
Answered: " 'Tis a bargain. Straightway will  
I sail.  
We'll go and come before the summer dies."

## VII

### THE VALKYR

#### I

THEN Sigurd his three ships made ready; oars  
And sails were overhauled; a pennant gay,  
Wrought by the fingers of the fair Gudrun—  
A golden fleur-de-lis on field of blue—  
The Dragon's masthead graced; and for a cruise  
The fleet was victualed. Many a barrel stout  
Of ale and meal and salted beef and pork  
Beneath the thwarts was stowed; and water  
casks,  
Filled from the sparkling Rhine, were not forgot.  
And when all things were ready and the day  
Dawned brightly of departure came the king,  
With all his court, down to the river bank  
To say good-bye. And at the last there stood  
Together, in a little group apart,  
Gunter and Hagen, Sigurd and Gudrun.  
And Sigurd grasped King Gunter's hand and  
then,  
Before the eyes of all, stooping, he kissed,

Upon her dewy lips, the sweet Gudrun—  
Betrothèd lovers' parting kiss—a draught  
Wherein, in equal quantities, are mixed  
Sweetness and sorrow, bitternes: and bliss.  
Then Sigurd straightway sought his dragon ship,  
And with him went the dark Burgundian knight,  
Hagen, and on the after-deck they stood  
Together, waving farewells to the shore.  
And when, beyond her ken, the last dim sail  
Had vanished, o'er the spirit of Gudrun  
Black grief descended and, all desolate,—  
Her life a world without its sun—she wept.

## II

Then down the winding Rhine the little fleet,  
Past lands of friends and foemen, made its  
way;  
And, reaching open sea, the Frisian coast—  
Low-lying, fringed with many a sandy isle—  
Skirted (as by the ancient trader's chart  
Directed) and then left the land behind,  
Northward and eastward steering, till at last,  
Out of the level ocean Sigurd saw  
The red cliffs of the sacred island rise.  
And on the island's top a ring of flame  
Burned, by the hand of Odin lit, and here,  
Within that fiery ring, so sang the skald,  
Upon a rock, the valkyr, Brynhild, slept.  
And Sigurd on the sandy spit below

His galleys beached and then, ere nightfall,  
    bade  
His mariners their evening meal prepare.

**III**

Now when the early summer sun its beams  
Cast o'er the sea and dyed to deeper red  
The ruddy cliffs of Helgoland uprose  
Sigurd and Hagen and, upon the sands  
Leaving the busy, bustling crews, essayed  
The steep ascent to Brynhild's rocky bower.  
Sheer from the sea on every side upsprang  
This island height, but Sigurd found a path,  
Unseen at first, which, starting from the beach,  
In many a zigzag, to the summit clomb;  
And up this path he, leading, made his way.  
But Hagen, heavy and of foot unsure,  
Though long he strove, at last, from very fear  
Of loss of limb or life, gave up the attempt,  
And all chagrined, sat down upon the sand.

**IV**

Now as he neared the summit a grey cloud  
Enveloped Sigurd and with slower steps  
He clambered till, all suddenly, he beheld,  
Barring his pathway, lurid in the mist,  
The wall of fire which girt the valkyr maid.  
And as he for a moment paused a shape

Unearthly close beside him he perceived;  
A shape seen once before by him, what time,  
In the deep forest, Fafnir's lair he sought;  
A shape one-eyed and huge, with great slouched  
hat

Topping its golden locks, and a blue cloak  
Covering its shoulders. Odin 'twas, in truth:  
Odin, All-Father, watching o'er his child.

Thus then the god: "Whither away, my lad?  
What seekst thou on this hilltop?" And to him  
Sigurd replied: "The valkyr maid I seek,  
Brynhild, whom on this rocky island-height,  
Girt by a wall of living fire, thy hand  
Hath prisoned!" Then the god Valhallan thus:  
"Woe—woe she'll bring thee, Sigurd. Would  
that I

Power had to stop thee, but the mystic Norns  
Have willed it, and no man escapes his fate.  
Woe brings the valkyr maiden—woe and death!"  
But Sigurd: "Unto Gunter have I pledged  
My word. I've sworn to fetch the maiden  
back."

Then Odin: "Aye, the hour foretold hath come.  
'Tis written in the book of Fate that thou,  
And thou alone, shouldst set the maiden free.  
Go on, my lad. Thy promise keep. What  
comes

Must come. Yon wall of magic fire which lifts  
So terribly its forkèd crest and bars  
Against all other men this mountain top

Thee cannot harm. Fear not, my lad. Farewell!"

With that he vanished. Then into the flame  
Plunged Sigurd, sword in hand, and from the  
flame

Issued, upon the other side, unscathed.

## v

Now when into that silent spot—that isle  
By fiery billows girt—had Sigurd come  
His eyes beheld, within a craggy niche,  
O'er which an ancient pine-tree sentry stood,  
The figure of the valkyr maiden couched  
Upon a moss-grown rock. Closed were her eyes  
As if in sleep; her tresses beautiful  
From underneath her wingèd helmet fled  
Adown the mossy pillow; her long shield  
Covered her body; and her valkyr spear  
Beside her rested. Motionless she lay  
As in some stately mausoleum lies  
A sculptured form of marble. Thus, for years  
Unnumbered had she slept, by Odin's power  
Preserved from perils of the earth and air—  
Fair daughter of the father of the gods.  
And Sigurd, lifting up the shield, beheld  
A maiden-form in snow-white samite gowned,  
But bodiced in a warrior's byrnies bright.  
And, for a time, all motionless he stood,  
Gazing upon the sight, and in his mind

What next to do revolving. Then beside  
The moss-grown rock falling upon one knee—  
E'en as 'twas written in the book of Fate—  
He kissed the cold lips of the valkyr maid.

## VI

As, at the kiss of spring-time, open wide  
The violet's eyes, so now, at Sigurd's kiss,  
Opened the blue eyes of the valkyr maid:  
And as, in April, through all nature runs  
New life and warmth, and sleeping earth awakes,  
So now, through Brynhild's sleeping form new life  
Surged warm and, like sweet April, she awoke.

## VII

"Who art thou that above me bendest? Naught  
Remember I since to this lonely isle  
My father Odin brought me, and with fire  
Begirt the rocky couch whereon I lay.  
Who art thou? And whence comest thou?  
Answer me!"

## VIII

Thus spake the valkyr maiden; and to her  
Sigurd replied: "My name is Sigurd. Thee  
I sought that I might bear thee to the land  
Of the Burgundians. Gunter waits thee there.  
A noble king doth crave thee for his bride."

**IX**

"And hast thou, then, a bride already?" Thus Brynhild. And Sigurd answered: "Nay, fair maid,  
No bride have I. Yet do I hope, ere long,  
A bride to claim. When thou dost Gunter wed,  
On that same day weds Gunter's sister me:  
Gudrun, the lily maid of Burgundy."

**X**

This hearing, from her couch the valkyr rose  
And, leaving spear and shield behind her, passed  
From out the grotto—silent—pale—and stood  
A little space away. Then thus she spoke:

**XI**

"And hath it come to this? Alas! Alas!  
Must I, a daughter of the mighty gods,  
Be wedded to this mortal who, although  
A king he calls himself, is but a churl  
To me? O, father Odin, was my fault  
So grievous? Have I not enough atoned?  
My punishment is more than I can bear!"

**XII**

So saying, in her hands she bowed her head,  
Crowned by the wingèd helmet, and with tears  
Bitter bewailed her miserable lot.

## XIII

Then Sigurd gently to the maiden spoke:  
“Weep not, sweet lady. ’Tis the way of life.  
What man is free? What woman? All are  
slaves.

Are not the mighty gods, e’en like ourselves,  
Bound by the chains of Fate? In Odin’s heart  
Reigns not deep ceaseless sorrow? Aye, my  
girl.

If he, thy father, to this lot consigned  
His best-belovèd daughter ’twas because  
Unto his eyes no other way appeared.  
Brynhild, weep not, but drink the cup which  
Fate

Sets to thy lips and, though it be bitter, smile  
And make the most of life. Unto us all,  
Both gods and men, ’tis mystery. Come, sweet  
maid.

Far from this lonely mountain summit, down  
Into the world, we’ll go, and thou, once more,  
Shalt live, e’en though within a lowlier sphere  
Confined. Behold, the magic fire is dead  
Which erstwhile girt thee round, and from this  
cliff

Thine eyes can see my galleys on the beach.  
Soon in the deep blue water will they ride  
Once more, as toward the fair Burgundian shores  
Brynhild they bear. And in that alien land,  
Whate’er betide thee, thy unfaltering friend,

True as the magnet to the steel, I'll be.  
 Come, Brynhild, come. Forget thy valkyr life.  
 Or, rather, forget not, but let it be  
 A golden memory which, like a fair lamp,  
 Shall light thy soul in many a dreary hour.  
 And in that future vast toward which we move—  
 Of which, e'en now, we are a part—perchance  
 Thou to those higher regions shalt return,  
 And of that freer life once more partake;—  
 A valkyr, bearing to Valhalla's halls,  
 With tender, ministering hands, the souls  
 Of heroes in their earthly fight o'erwhelmed.”

## XIV

“Like Bragi dost thou speak; like Bragi, god  
 Of eloquence and poetry and song.  
 Methinks, some day, thou wilt be one of those  
 Who sit around my father Odin's board.”

## XV

Thus Brynhild; and to her Sigurd replied:  
 “Perchance, then, in that life to come, amidst  
 Valhalla's glories, once more will we meet.  
 But, whatsoe'er the future brings, thy path  
 Today leads toward the Rhine. Is it not so?  
 Believe me, Brynhild, there's no other way.”

## XVI

She bowed assent; and down the ruddy cliffs,  
 Each ever and anon the other's hand

Clasping, they went; he out into the world  
Unknown that haughty spirit leading, once  
A valkyr, now a woman. And within  
The cabin of the Dragon (which, betimes,  
E'en by Gudrun's deft hands, had been prepared  
For this fair guest, with tapestries all hung,  
And stored with gowns and gems such as befit  
A maiden's bower) he placed her, and himself  
And Hægen on the after-deck above,  
Out where the winds and waters sang, abode.

## xvii

Then o'er the deep the *Dragon* led the way,  
The *Wolf* and *Bear* close following, and astern—  
Bereft henceforward of their crown of fire—  
Faded the ruddy cliffs of Helgoland.

## VIII

### SIGURD AND GUNTER

#### I

"Now comes once more the ancient feast of  
Yule,

Now comes once more that joyous festival  
Which men, from immemorial time, have held  
Supreme, above all others taking rank,  
And justly, so it ever seemed to me.  
For what is it we celebrate? Is't not  
A heavenly circumstance of import high  
All slighter things transcending? Is it not  
The time when the great Sun, the wheel of fire,  
The source of light and life and all that is,  
The golden symbol of All-Father's eye,  
Ceases henceforward to withdraw himself  
(Each daily visit briefer than the last)  
And, turning in his course, all reconciled,  
Comes back to earth with ever-lengthening  
strides:—

With outstretched arms and kindly-beaming  
face

Comes back once more to earth, in darkness  
wrapt  
Perpetual but for him; darkness like that  
Which in the shadowy halls of Hela reigns—  
Pale goddess subterrane, whose realms receive  
The souls of the unrighteous after death?  
Aye, this it is we celebrate; this hour  
Supreme, with brightest consequences fraught.  
A season for rejoicing, then, is Yule;  
A season, therefore, so it seems to me,  
Well-fitted for our nuptials. What thinkst  
thou?"

## II

Thus Gunter, King of the Burgundians, spoke  
To Sigurd as, within a spacious room  
Of that old Roman palace by the Rhine,  
Beside a fire of mighty logs, they stood.

## III

And Sigurd answered: "Sire, betrothed am I  
To thy fair sister and, like lovers all,  
Too soon for me the happy wedding day,  
E'en though it were tomorrow, cannot come."

## IV

To whom then Gunter thus, whose cloudy brow  
Bespoke the troubled soul which dwelt within:

"Like thine is my desire, and 'twas my plan  
To celebrate our nuptials, thine and mine,  
Close-following the return from Helgoland.  
But ever more the haughty valkyr maid,  
With this and that excuse, hath put me off,  
Till 'nay,' at last, no longer could she speak,  
And hath at Yule-tide promised to be mine.  
Methinks, sometimes, she loves me not; and yet  
Her deeply do I love. My brightest dreams  
Of what she'd be, compared with what she is,  
Were like the frescoed figure on the wall  
Matched with the beauty of the living maid;  
And for the hour which makes us one I long.  
And yet, if she doth love me not, what good?  
'Tis but the shadow that I clasp; 'tis but  
The garment of the soul, however fair,  
That mine becomes; the substance hath escaped.  
Would that her valkyr spirit I could win,  
And merge her life with mine! But, ah, to love  
Brings not love in return, and marble-cold  
Meseems she stands—far, far beyond my reach.  
Alas, the poorest swain who ploughs the earth,  
Or sails the sea, and holds some woman's heart  
All, all his own, is happier far than I."

## v

He ceased and gazing out upon the Rhine  
Remained, all silent, for a little space,  
Then spoke again: "Nathless our wedding day

We'll celebrate, my Sigurd, thou and I:  
Perchance with better knowledge of her spouse  
Brynhild may love me better. As for thee  
Already art thou sun and moon and stars  
And heaven's transcendent brightness to  
Gudrun."

## IX

### YULE-TIDE AT THE COURT OF KING GUNTER

#### I

(Including the Song of Olaf the Red)

YULE-TIDE! And in King Gunter's palace reigns  
Revelry such as ne'er before was seen,  
By oldest greybeard, in all Burgundy!  
For is it not the hour auspicious, set  
E'en by the merry-hearted king himself,  
When here have met, from far and near, the  
guests

To celebrate, with feasting and with song,  
After the manner of the olden time,  
The double wedding? Is it not the hour  
Blest by the presence of all-knowing Var,  
Goddess of marriage, who to lovers' vows  
Listens attentive, and who broken troth  
Doth ever punish? Is it not the hour  
Dedicate not alone to love's delights  
But also to the gaieties of Yule—  
Mad, merry Yule? Let laughter unconfined  
Reign, therefore, and illimitable joy!

II

Now are the guests all gathered in the hall,  
Which almost like the greenwood doth appear,  
With holly hung and sacred mistletoe.  
Now ready are the harpers with their harps,  
And lighted are the mighty logs of Yule.  
Now, wreathed in green, an apple in his mouth,  
As ancient custom bids, and borne aloft  
By lackeys tall, the smoking Boar's Head comes.

III

Upon the dais, with the merry court  
To right and left, and guests resplendent, sat  
Gunter and Brynhild, Sigurd and Gudrun.  
Brightly upon the finger of each bride  
Sparkled the wedding-ring; on Brynhild's brow,  
Marking before the world her queenly state,  
Glittered a golden crown with diamonds set;  
And round the white neck of Gudrun, the gift  
Of Sigurd, hung a string of lustrous pearls,  
Precious beyond compare, chief ornament  
Of the dark Niblung's Hoard. As mariner  
Watches, by night, the Cynosure, his eyes  
Ever to it returning, so all eyes  
In that great hall the bridal-party watched;  
Ever returning, irresistibly  
Drawn from all other things of lesser note,  
To dwell upon that constellation bright.

**IV**

Below, at the great table, filled with cheer,  
Which ran the whole length of the mighty hall  
From door to dais, Gunter's men-at-arms  
Feasted with merry din; and them among,  
Each tar between two spearmen, that the guest  
Might want for nothing, Sigurd's vikings sat.  
E'en thus, upon that memorable night  
When first they met, six months ago, they sat,  
In golden summer when the days were long.  
And round and round the mighty drinking-horns  
Passed with the nut-brown ale or sparkling mead,  
Passed, with their precious freight, from lip to  
lip,

Ever to be replenished and repass,  
Filled from great casks within the cellar stored.  
And Norseman and Burgundian drank "Was-  
hael!"

Each to the other, and ere the bearded lips  
Were dry, "Skoel to the viking!" and again  
"Prosit!" and mellow friendship ruled the hour,  
For Bacchus doth make brothers of us all.  
And in the middle of the wassail, lo!  
Twelve harpers good, beside the dais stair  
Stationed, where all could hear their symphonies,  
Struck string and, to their music keeping step,  
Entered King Momus, from a hidden door  
Issuing upon the hall—Lord of Misrule—  
Followed apace by all his motley crew.

And some—like Momus, sovereign lord, himself—

Were masked and others like the foolish clown

Painted who to this day, at merry Yule,

Disports with columbine and harlequin.

And round and round the mighty hall they went,

As mummers will, with all extravagance;

These marching with a mock solemnity,

Those—men and maidens in apparel gay—

Their skill terpsichorean setting forth

In pantomimic dance fantastical,

And others yet to wake the mirthful laugh

Seeking with antics of the primal fool—

Horse-play and somersaults, coarse mimicry.

Tooting of horns and many another trick

Ancient as is the zany's ancient art.

And when, at last, it seemed that long enough

Had folly and unreason gross held sway,

Gunter a signal gave, and the twelve skalds

Their music ceased. And as a fair jet d'eau,

Rising from sculptured fountain high in air,

Suddenly falls when cut off is the stream,

So, suddenly, when the music ended, ceased

The hurly-burly in King Gunter's hall.

And at the oaken board old Momus found

A vacant place, and of his mummers some

Beside him perched and others round about

Or sat or lay upon the rush-strewn floor.

## V

Then, at the bidding of the king, stept forth,  
With harp in hand, from out the throng of  
skalds,

An ancient bard, Olaf the Red yclept,  
Who had with Sigurd from the Northland come.  
White were his locks as those of Hoder old,  
Though ruddy as the beard of Thor they'd been  
In younger days, when he his surname got.  
Noble his bearing. One of those was he  
Who voice the passions of the human heart,  
Or paint the deeds of the heroic past.  
One of that gifted company (although  
Naught but a lowly neophyte) to which  
Belong great Homer and the Mantuan bard  
Illustrious, high priests of the epic muse.  
Oft in the presence of the enemy's fleet  
His battle song he'd sung, or at the feasts  
Of kings chanted adventures wild and weird.  
Of gods and goddesses tonight he sang,  
And chiefly of that valiant deity  
Who ever with the mountain giants fought—  
Bluff Thor, the idol of all Scandian hearts.

*(The Song of Olaf the Red)*

## VI

Thus ran his song. Once did the green-haired  
god  
Who dwells within the illimitable deep,

Ægir, prepare a banquet for the gods  
Whose home is highest heaven; and to the halls  
Of ocean came, a glorious company,  
Upon the day appointed for the event,  
The mighty ones of Asgard. Round the board  
Of Ægir now they sit, those peerless ones,  
Drinking the nut-brown ale and foaming mead.  
Behold, upon the right hand of the host,  
Odin enthroned, father of gods and men,  
Ruler of heaven and earth, whose will is law  
Through all the vast expanse save when athwart  
The purposes it runs of the pale Norns,  
The sisters three inscrutable who sit  
Beside the ash-tree Ygdrasil and hold  
Within their hands the thread of every life:  
The sisters three of Fate unchangeable—  
The Past, the Present and the Future—Urd,  
Verdandi, Skuld—them—them alone he dreads;  
The mystic ones who sit above the gods,  
And the beginning and the end behold  
Of all created things. Pleasure today  
Lights the All-Father's visage, where doth dwell  
Sadness too often, sadness at the lot  
Of human kind. Gracious his mien divine,  
As in the halls of Ægir now he sits,  
Amongst the gods and goddesses, his mead  
Nectarean drinking, and ever and anon  
Feeding with morsels from the banquet board  
His ravens twain, Hugin and Munin, who  
Him tidings bring from earth's remotest parts,

Or bear his mandate to contending hosts.  
Upon the high back of their master's chair  
Now rest these sable messengers, while crouch  
About the monarch's feet, like faithful dogs,  
The two grey wolves who ever him attend.  
Them likewise doth he feed with morsels rare.

## VII

Beside the wise All-Father Frigga sits,  
His spouse and queen, goddess of wedded love,  
Of spotless chastity, and motherhood,  
And all the sacred virtues of the home.  
Stern guardian of the marriage bond is she,  
And oft her voice upbraiding Odin hears,  
For hard it is Frigga to always please.  
Nathless no hypocrite is Odin's queen.  
A virtuous wife she dwells beside her lord,  
And in her life exemplifies her words.

## VIII

Next to his mother Frigga now behold  
Bright Balder; he of all the mighty gods  
The best-belovèd and most beautiful.  
God of the Sun, lord of the summer-time,  
The source of light and life and all things fair,  
Who doth not Balder love? In all this world,  
So sang the ancient skalds, naught could be  
found,

Nor man, nor beast, nor bird, nor stock, nor stone,  
That loved not Balder: naught save one small shrub,  
The mistletoe yclept; and with a twig  
From this ill-fated plant, thrown by the hand  
Of Hoder blind (whom Loki's wicked spleen  
Trickt to the deed) was beauteous Balder slain.  
Yet doth he rise each year from Hela's gloom,  
Renewed, immortal, glorious as of old,  
God of the summer sunshine evermore.  
Close by his side the gentle Nanna sits,  
His faithful spouse who, when bright Balder died,  
Herself—who did subsist upon his love—  
Perished of sorrow inconsolable.  
Yet like her lord from Hela doth she rise,  
What time the golden Spring returns to earth,  
Holp from those gloomy depths by his strong arm.

**IX**

Tyr next we see, the one-armed god of war,  
His missing limb by the fierce Fenris wolf  
Torn from his body. For when the Asgard gods  
Sought to securely bind the Fenris Wolf  
(Which is a symbol of devouring fire,  
All-devastating, uncontrollable)—

Ne'er would he stand at rest unless a god,  
As pledge of fair intent, would place his arm  
Betwixt the creature's jaws. This then did Tyr.  
But when the wolf, betrayed and bound at last,  
His fate perceived he, in revengeful rage,  
Tyr's arm tore off below the elbow joint.  
Thus Tyr, to save the world, gave up his arm,  
And, if 'twere needful, would have given his life,  
As ever have the brave, or gods or men,  
Done, without question, for the common-weal.

## x

Here likewise Loki sits, the god perverse,  
The mischief-maker sly, the evil one.  
Scoffer at all things by the gods held good,  
Father of lies, of wickedness the source.  
If trouble came 'twas ever Loki's fault,  
If discord rose false Loki was the cause.  
Evil to him seemed good, and what the gods  
Eschewed as wicked aye was his delight,  
So full of all perverseness was his heart.  
Him did the gods of Asgard for a while  
Suffer to roam at will through earth and heaven,  
But came a time when e'en the All-Father wise  
Lost patience with his son and to a rock  
Fast chained him, with a viper overhead,  
Which ever dropt its poison on his breast.  
But who so wicked that no woman's heart  
He hath to love him? None—nor man nor god.

## **Yule-tide at Gunter's Court** 111

And to the rock with Loki went his wife  
Siguna, and beside him ever sits,  
Catching the viper's poison in a cup,  
Ere on her husband's naked breast it falls.

### **XI**

And here, a deity benign, sits Frey,  
To whom the Scandian farmer every prays  
For plenteous crops; who rain and sunshine  
sends,  
Each as 'tis needed, and propitious airs,  
And at the last a harvest bountiful.  
The son of Niord, an ancient ocean god,  
Who ruled the coasts as *Ægir* ruled the deep,  
Was Frey, and fair his sister as himself,  
Freya, aye fairer, for in heaven or earth  
What lovelier thing than Freya doth exist,  
Goddess of youth and beauty and of love?  
Behold them sitting now in *Ægir*'s hall,  
Freya and Frey, the children beautiful  
Whom Niord unto the gods of Asgard gave!  
As in a brooch a pearl of ocean shines  
Among a score of gems (though past all price  
These others be, yet none is like the pearl  
In lustre soft and milk-white loveliness)  
So doth this daughter of the ocean god,  
This foam-sprung Aphrodite of the North,  
Among the mighty ones of Asgard shine,  
Forever young, forever beautiful.

## XII

And here, long-bearded, like the bard who tells  
This tale tonight in Gunter's palace, sits  
Bragi, of song and eloquence the god.  
A wondrous harp within his hand he holds,  
And oftentimes to the gods and goddesses  
He sings, and of all skalds the best is he.  
Next to him sits his spouse, Iduna fair,  
She who the apples of immortal life  
Doth keep. For when the gods and goddesses  
Aweary are, and feel the hand of Time  
Bearing upon them, straightway do they seek  
That garden where Iduna's apples grow,  
Which having eaten, youth returns again.  
So wondrous potent is the golden fruit.

## XIII

Here likewise Vidar sits, the silent one,  
Who doth the deep primeval forest love.  
Seldom among the gods to banquet board  
He comes, but in the impenetrable wood  
Abides by preference; and when in the halls  
Of Asgard, or on Ida's flowery plain,  
At times, he shows, always an air he hath  
Distrait, as though within the silent wood,  
Rather than in the glittering palaces  
Among the Asas bright, he longed to be.  
But Ægir doth he love, and to the feast

Of ocean's god hath come—a happy guest—  
And in his rightful place he sits today.

**XIV**

And ancient Hoenir likewise here doth sit,  
And Vali strong, and wise Forseti, god  
Of justice, who all rulers doth inspire  
That seek his aid; lies cannot them deceive,  
But even-handed justice they dispense;  
And Heimdal, keeper of the rainbow bridge  
O'er which the gods and goddesses to earth  
Descend and, when their missions are fulfilled,  
Ascend, a bright procession, to the skies;  
And Hoder blind, that god unfortunate  
Who, trickt by Loki's mischief-making guile,  
The beauteous Balder slew; and Hermod swift,  
Who to the gloomy gates of Hela's realm  
Descended, and that goddess importuned,  
For many days, bright Balder to release,  
But no—all unavailing was his quest;  
And Rinda, goddess of the wintry earth;  
And Uller, Bowman famous, who to hunt  
On snow-shoes o'er the white snow-surface loves.  
These and yet other gods and goddesses  
Of rank distinguished, now within the halls  
Of Ægir sit—a glorious company.

**XV**

Last but not least, here sits the Thunder-God,  
Impetuous, fierce, yet kind of heart withal;

The hero of a hundred cherished tales  
Told by the saga-man in smoky hall,  
Or chanted by the bard at banquet board,  
Or crooned by Norseland mother to her child;  
Here now he sits who with the giants huge  
Doth ever love to fight, and goblins fierce;  
Red-bearded Thor, of all the many sons  
Of Odin, nearest to the Norseman's heart.

## XVI

Now in the middle of the mighty feast,  
As round and round the foaming horns of ale  
Were passing, and in every heart joy reigned,  
The green-haired Ægir thus addressed his guests:

## XVII

“Vast are my stores of mead and ale and none  
Has ever from my table thirsty gone,  
But I of something better far have heard  
Than these great horns which, fix it as we may,  
Ever and ever must replenished be.  
Something it is, in truth, most wonderful,  
Not understandable the thing by me,  
And yet assured am I it doth exist.”

## XVIII

He paused a moment; on the ancient god  
All eyes were turned; then slowly he went on.

**XIX**

“What say ye, Asas, to a wondrous cup,  
Which none can drain, made by the cunning  
dwarfs  
Who dwell within the bowels of the earth?  
A vessel from whose depths the fragrant ale  
Forever issues, foaming like a force?  
A magic goblet which nor man nor god  
Nor mountain giant horrible and huge  
Can empty, though from eve to morn he drink,  
And then again from morn till dusky eve?  
What say ye, Asas, to a cup like this?”

**XX**

His emerald locks the King of Ocean shook,  
Smiled to himself and then again went on:

**XXI**

“Far in the North 'tis held, this magic cup.  
And would ye know, ye gods and goddesses,  
Who dwell in heaven, and tread the flowery  
plains  
Of Ida, and upon the rainbow bridge  
Descend, a bright procession, or ascend,  
And drink the mead of Odin, would ye know  
What churl profane hath gotten this rare prize?  
Old Skrymer, of the mountain giants king!  
By him and them and all their kin 'tis used—

A jewel bright within the snouts of swine.  
By heavens! Old though I be, I've often thought  
Myself would some day strive, by craft or force,  
To get possession of this wondrous cup.  
What think ye, Asas? 'Twere a glorious deed."

## XXII

Intently listened all. Then from his seat  
Uprose the Thunder-God—red-bearded Thor—  
And thus, with many a fiery gesture, spake:

## XXIII

"To me belongs this deed. To me who aye  
Have fought with giants and hobgoblins fierce!  
Their tricks I know: their deep deceptive ways.  
'Tis ever my delight to harass them.  
Therefore if me the All-Father will permit,  
Straightway, ye gods, I'll go upon this quest."

## XXIV

He ceased, and thus the king of gods and men:  
"Brave words are these, my Thor; brave words,  
my son.  
But ever thou wast daring, and a deed  
Like this did ever to thy heart appeal.  
Go. Smite the giants, and bring back the cup."

**xxv**

Then from the banquet of the gods went forth  
Red-bearded Thor, blustering and full of wrath.  
Miolner he seized; and soon his golden car  
Leaped to the clouds, by goats impetuous  
drawn.

His hammer first to right and then to left  
He hurled in fierce delight; his chariot wheels  
Rumbled amidst the clouds; and from the plain  
The sons of men beheld the storm rush by.  
So went god Thor against his giant foes.

**xxvi**

Now northward and yet northward sped the god  
Until at last the utmost boreal point  
Of Scandian land he reached—that wedge-like  
cape

Which juts into the lonely Polar Sea.  
And here, within a subterranean hall  
Enormous, many a rood in length and breadth,  
The giant Skrymer dwelt. Into that hall  
Strode, all impetuous, the Thunder-God,  
Miolner in hand. Here, at a table long,  
The giants sat, old Skrymer at its head.  
To whom god Thor, with crafty, flattering  
words:

## XXVII

"Hail Skrymer, of the mountain giants king!  
(For that I now behold that monarch great  
Of whose brave deeds my ears have oftentimes  
heard

I cannot doubt.) Hail all ye courtiers fair!  
Upon a quest of import high I come,  
Commissioned by the father of the gods,  
Odin, than whom no greater name exists  
In heaven or earth or Hela's realms below:  
A quest of import but most difficult,  
And therefore your assistance now I crave.  
A wondrous cup I seek which, so 'tis said,  
No god can empty though from eve to morn  
He drink, and then again from morn till eve.  
No god can empty it, and yet, methinks,  
'Twould be an easy task for one of you,  
For giants in a mightier mould are made."

## XXVIII

He ceased: o'er Skrymer's visage crept a smile  
As to the fulsome flattery of the god  
He listened: then the giant thus replied:

## XXIX

"Welcome art thou, O Thor, to giant land!  
Welcome to this, our banquet hall! The cup  
Which none can empty, and which now thou  
seekst,

Mine eyes have seen. Yea, from its brim my  
lips  
Have drank the magic ale which bubbles forth.  
But let's of that hereafter. Sit thee down  
Among us, and be merry with the rest,  
Drinking the liquor which ourselves have  
brewed.  
None better comes, e'en from the enchanted  
cup."

XXX

So saying, to a place at his right hand  
He motioned, and ere little time had passed  
God Thor was feasting with his giant foes.

XXXI

Now when their fill this glorious company  
Had drank and eaten, Skrymer thus addressed  
His Asa guest: "Some feats of strength and  
skill,  
To while away the night, we oftentimes have.  
What sayst thou, Thor? Thou art the honoured  
guest.  
Thyself, therefore, must have the premier trial.  
Here is a cup filled to the brim with ale.  
Do thou now empty it. A test it is  
Of manhood with us giants. At one draught  
Most of us drain it, but in two, at most,  
The weakest of our band can finish it."

## XXXII

With smile of confidence the Asa took  
The cup within his hands, then to his lips  
Placed it, and with a mighty effort drank,  
Seeking in one long draught to empty it.  
But though he drank till all his breath was gone  
Scarce had the liquor sank below the brim.

## XXXIII

Old Skrymer smiled. "Methinks our honoured  
guest  
Two drinks will need in which to drain the cup.  
Nay, do not be discouraged. Try again."

## XXXIV

But though again and yet again he strove,  
The God of Thunder could not drain the cup.  
Nay, scarce the liquor sank below the brim.

## XXXV

Then Skrymer thus: "Perchance some other  
feat  
The god can better do—some easier thing.  
A black cat have we here. Methinks to lift  
This cat from off the floor were no hard task."

xxxvi

Crestfallen Thor the cat essayed to lift.  
But though he strove with all his might and  
main,  
Barely to move one foot from off the floor  
Took all the strength he had. Strange did it  
seem.

xxxvii

Then Skrymer smiled, and once again he spoke:  
“Much have I heard of Asa Thor—his strength,  
His reckless courage and his wondrous deeds,  
And yet some little feat, such as a child  
Were equal to, he cannot now perform.  
Methinks his prowess has been overpraised.  
However, one more trial of strength we'll have—  
Perchance his reputation he'll retrieve.  
Come hither, nurse, and with this god contend.  
A wrestling match we'll have. Methinks in  
this—  
A noble sport,—our guest doth all excel.”

xxxviii

As thus he spoke a pale and withered hag  
Hobbled across the hall and grappling Thor  
Within her arms (though with all strength the  
god

Struggled to free himself from her embrace)  
Lifted him from his feet. Then to the floor  
Tost him, as though a feather in her hands.

## XXXIX

Loud laughed the giants all. But Skrymer led  
Back to his seat the god. "No more we'll mar,  
With these rough tricks, our hospitality.  
Come, brothers, to this Asa brave let's drink  
Good health and happiness; and may he bear  
To all who dwell in Asgard's shining halls,  
And on the flowery plains of Ida meet  
For interchange of thought and converse wise,  
Best wishes from the giants of the North."

## XL

Now when it came Thor's time to go uprose  
All those huge giants and did him salute.  
(Three times the height of mortal men they  
stand)

But Skrymer out into the open air—  
Where waited for the god his goat-drawn car—  
Passed with him and, when quite alone they  
were,

Thus spoke: "Be not down-hearted, Asa Thor,  
That in those feats such showing poor thou  
madest.

In truth, 'twas all enchantment. The gold cup  
Thou couldst not empty, from the mighty deep

Its liquor drew (though changed to foaming ale  
Was this by witchcraft) and when thou didst  
drink

The sea ran backward from the sandy shore  
E'en as the tide doth ebb, and on the beach  
The greybeards stood, watching in wonderment  
That ocean thus, all out of time, should ebb.  
The cat thou soughtst to lift was not a cat,  
But the great Midgard Serpent who beneath  
The illimitable ocean ever dreams,  
To wake not till the Day of Ragnorok;  
And when one paw thy Asa strength did lift,  
Methought the ending of all things had come.  
And the beshriveled hag who threw thee down,  
Dost think she was a common beldame? Nay.  
Old Age she was, who conquers every one.  
Well, therefore, Thor, didst thou acquit thyself,  
Almost to accomplish the impossible.  
Lives not, in earth or heaven, a braver soul.  
And, as a mark of my sincere regard,  
This magic goblet, from whose depths the ale  
Forever flows, on thee I now bestow.  
Already in the banquet hall thy lips  
Have proved its wondrous capabilities."

**XLI**

So saying, in the hands of Thor he placed  
The magic cup; but ere the astonished god  
Could voice his thanks, old Skrymer in the air

Had vanished, for in all illusions strange,  
And every kind of witchcraft was he wise.

## XLII

Then to his golden car the Thunder-God  
Turned, and re-entered, and his restless goats  
Swift-mounted to the clouds, as toward the hall  
Of Ægir now the happy Asa sped,  
Bearing within his hands the magic cup.

*(End of the Song of Olaf the Red)*

## XLIII

The minstrel ceased, and through the banquet  
hall  
Rang mighty plaudits of the voice and hand.  
And when the din had somewhat slackened rose  
King Gunter from his seat beside his bride,  
High on the dais, and with words of praise  
Olaf saluted, and a purse of gold  
Likewise bestowed upon the famous bard.  
Then round the board the horns of nut-brown  
ale  
Resumed their journey, and the mighty logs  
Brighter and ever brighter blazed. The night  
Moved onward with a joyous majesty.  
E'en like Valhalla seemed the glittering scene—  
That glorious hall above where, after death,  
The heroes feast among the immortal gods.

**XLIV**

Thus flourished Yule-tide at King Gunter's court.

And thus the double wedding, with all pomp,  
Was celebrated. Surely 'twas a time  
For laughter and illimitable joy—  
A marriage feast, a feast of Yule, in one.

# X

## IN THE GARDEN

### I

Now northward once more comes the Sun, from  
climes

Austral returning to the German land,  
And straight before his glorious presence flee  
Darkness and cold as, with a bounteous hand,  
Light he dispenses—vivifying light—  
And balmy winds, and ever-lengthening days.  
And as, in Roman triumph, at the front  
Of the long line the conqueror rides, and him  
Fair captive maidens follow, crown'd with  
flowers,

So now, as up the heavenly highway rides  
Balder triumphant, in his train appears  
Bright Easter, goddess of the spring, by troupes  
Of sunny hours accompanied—maidens fair,  
Nymphs of the golden spring-time, such as wake  
The hearts of men to ecstasy—with flowers  
Bedecked and followed by melodious birds.  
So rises Balder out of Hela's shades—  
Immortal, glorious—bringing back to earth

Light, life, and all we love. So follow him,  
Year after year, dear to the hearts of men,  
The spirits of the spring-time jubilant—  
Easter and all her nymphs—a pageant fair!

## II

Within her garden, at the sunset hour,  
Queen Brynhild sat; but on her spirit fell,  
Well-nigh unheeded, all the charms of spring.  
The soft caresses of the balmy breeze,  
The upturned faces of the early flowers,  
The voices sweet of the returning birds,  
None, none could pierce the armour of her  
gloom.

E'en as a mourner gazing on some show  
Beholds it not, or only half beholds,  
Conscious but dimly of the spectacle,  
So Brynhild gazed upon the earth and sky.  
Bitter her soul, brooding upon its wrong,  
Ever rebelling against Fate's decree.  
And as, encompassed by her mood, she sat,  
To her King Gunter, through the palace grounds  
Slow wandering with his dogs at close of day,  
Came and, half chidingly, thus her addressed:

## III

"Brynhild, my queen, why dost thou ever sit  
Alone? Why dost thou ever seek the spot

Where none assemble? Queens should gracious  
be,

Shining, like the resplendent sun, for all;  
Not leading lives recluse, like cloistered nuns,  
Unseen of men. Lovest thou not the gay court,  
With all its joys? Lovest thou not Burgundy,  
Our beauteous land? Lovest thou not me, its  
king?"

## IV

Thus Gunter: to the valkyr's eyes a light  
Leaped like a sword flashing from out its sheath:  
Then, rising to her feet, she spoke: "What use  
Longer to play a part? I love thee not;  
Thee nor thy court nor Burgundy. A trick,  
Abhorred of Odin, gave me to thy arms.  
Rather upon that mountain would I sleep  
Once more, where long I slept, begirt by fire,  
Far in the northern seas, than be thy queen!  
Methinks oftentimes upon that lonely isle,  
With helmet bowed, my father Odin sits,  
Grieving upon his erring daughter's fate.  
O would that I could see once more his face,  
E'en though by wrath and sorrow clouded o'er!  
See as I saw it when, with waving spear,  
He cast the spell about me, and the flames  
Commanded to protect me from all harm!  
Happier my heart to be by him condemned  
Than by the ignoble Gunter to be praised!"

## v

Thus Brynhild: then, like some long pent-up  
flood

Bursting, at last, its barriers strong, went on:  
“I love thee not! Art thou the hero bright  
My father Odin dreamt of when he girt  
My rocky couch with fire and sought thereby  
To save me from all men of common clay?  
Art thou the mortal for a goddess meet?  
Art thou the viking bold who sailed the seas,  
Seeking the sacred isle of Helgoland,  
And climbed the dizzy cliff, and through the  
flame

Plunged, and the spell dissolved which held me  
fast?

To him do I belong, and not to thee,  
Ingloriously waiting by the Rhine!  
For him was I intended. Thus 'twas planned  
By the immortal father of the gods.  
But o'er the gods the mystic sisters sit,  
Spinning the thread of Fate; the sisters three,  
All potent, cruel; Urd, Verdandi, Skuld.  
And jealous of my beauty and my power  
Were they (at least, such is my thought) and  
sought

Me to abase who in Valhalla's halls  
Once shone more lovely than fair Freya's self,  
And dwelt supreme in the All-Father's heart.  
Alas! most treacherously have the dread Norns

Dealt by me, and the purpose merciful  
 Of Odin,—to preserve me from the worst,—  
 Thwarted. The weakling Gunter have I got;  
 I who was meant for Sigurd. Alas! Alas!”

## VI

“Lovest thou then Sigurd?” Thus the king;  
 and him  
 Answered the valkyr, haughty was her mien:  
 “No man I love; but of all earthly men  
 Sigurd, the son of Sigmund, is the best;  
 And like bright Balder in the east doth shine  
 Eclipsing with his light the puny stars.”

## VII

“Thou lovest Sigurd! Aye!” King Gunter  
 gasped.  
 “Fool, that mine eyes discerned it not before!”

## VIII

So saying (like a wounded man who strives  
 Steadily to walk, but staggers in his gait,  
 Stunned by the shock, and faint from loss of  
 blood),  
 King Gunter from the fatal garden passed.  
 And, as he slowly trod, once round he turned  
 And, looking backward wistfully, beheld,  
 Lit by the last rays of the setting sun,  
 Her face within her hands, as if she wept,  
 Brynhild the valkyr, standing motionless.

## XI

### GUNTER'S SOLILOQUY

#### I

“BEFORE me in the rocky isle he was,  
Before me in the valkyr’s stormy heart.  
Methinks I see it all. E’en as the sun,  
Risen, doth illumine with his light a road  
Wherein by night we walked in darkness dense,  
And looking back with unobstructed eyes  
Clearly we see that road, so have her words  
Illumed the path wherein I long have trod.  
Fool! Purblind, blundering fool! By the dark  
clouds  
Of egotism enwrapped and vain conceit,  
Seeing not what to all other eyes was plain.  
She loves him; she hath loved him from the first;  
And I, the king, am naught. Aye, worse than  
naught;  
Stupidly standing, a poor loathsome thing,  
Ever between her heart and its desire.  
Yet do I blame them not. The fault was mine,  
If fault it can be called to harbour love,  
Which comes unbidden and at his own will

Departs. A boy capricious, as the bards  
Of Greece and Rome have ever pictured him.  
Cupid, the wandering archer, full of guile.  
She loves him? Aye. But free from fault are  
they;  
Wholly, devotedly he loves Gudrun.  
She loves him? Aye. But hopeless is her love;  
E'en like mine own. Would that we ne'er had  
met,  
Fair Brynhild, that I ne'er had heard thy name!"

## II

Thus Gunter with himself communed: his  
dream  
Vanished as vanishes, by a prickle pierced,  
The iridescent bubble in the air.

## XII

### HAGEN AND GISELHER

#### I

“HERE let us sit, beneath this ancient elm  
Which once more, at the magic touch of spring,  
Bursts into bloom. Something upon my mind  
Lies which I fain would tell to thee alone.”

#### II

Thus Hagen, o'er the April meadows green  
Roaming with Giselher, the king's brother,  
spoke.

Then, as themselves they seated, he went on:

#### III

“Know that last eve, when sunset dyed the sky,  
I, wandering near the garden of the queen,  
Heard voices, or, to be more accurate,  
A woman's voice and, nearer to the spot  
Drawing, beheld King Gunter and his spouse,  
Brynhild the valkyr. He in silence stood;

Vehement her utterance. Much against my will

Was it, like some low eavesdropper, to list;  
But from the place I could not then escape,  
And forced was I to hear. This, then, the gist

Of Brynhild's wild tirade,—That she, in truth,  
Loved Gunter not a whit, nor ever had,  
But only Sigurd. Scarcely could my ears  
Believe the words. Thy brother, like a man  
Stabbed to the heart, with face white as a ghost,

Listened in silence, then, some broken words  
Muttering, passed like a shadow from the spot.

My heart wept for him. But the valkyr stood,  
Wrapped in her gloom, a statue motionless;  
And afterward upon the garden bench  
Sitting remained till long into the night.  
Perchance she waited Sigurd there? Who knows?"

**IV**

"What thinkst thou, Hagen, is't an olden flame  
Long smouldering and now bursting through its bounds,

Or is it something new, this love betwixt  
Queen Brynhild and the Norseman?" Giselher thus.

## v

To whom then Hagen: "I know not. Me-thinks,

However, that upon the selfsame day  
Of their first meeting the amour began.  
False was he to the king—false to Gudrun.  
No word of mine this accusation gross  
Hath hinted until now but, ne'ertheless,  
Ever within my breast suspicion dwelt  
And would not down, and now the traitress  
lips

Of Brynhild have themselves proclaimed the  
worst.

This will I tell thee which I never told  
The king, thy brother. When in Helgoland  
We landed, up the cliff precipitous  
Which led to Brynhild's bower enchanted I,  
Being of body bulky, could not climb,  
And on the sandy beach was forced to wait,  
Impatiently, the upshot of the attempt.  
The meeting on the mountain top, therefore,  
I saw not, nor have I, from then till now,  
From lips of either Sigurd or the queen,  
Learned aught about it, though the livelong  
day,

From morn till eve, they passed together. This  
(Perchance 'twas wrong,) I never told the king,  
Fearing his deep displeasure, though, methinks,  
Sigurd he wholly trusted until now."

## VI

"Belike the Norseman's blood alone will quench  
Gunter's deep thirst for vengeance? What  
thinkst thou?"

Thus Giselher, and to him Hagen replied:

## VII

"Would it were so! This Sigurd I love not.  
If he hath been disloyal to his king,  
Thy brother, and disloyal to his bride,  
Thy sister, then methinks his faithless life  
Were better ended. Yet I fear the trust  
Of Gunter in his friend, so absolute,  
May, e'en against the damning evidence,  
Unshaken stand. This, then, shall be our task—  
To see to it that Gunter falters not  
In wreaking vengeance on the outlander;  
But if he weakly hesitate (his faith  
In Sigurd, spite of all appearances  
Avowing) then ourselves to strike the blow,  
For the king's honour, and for Burgundy!"

## VIII

Thus Hagen, with indignant gesture, spoke,  
Feigning the old retainer's loyal rage,  
And to his eyes the light of cruel hate  
Leaped, as he spoke, like a malignant flame

Rising from out the realms of the accurst,  
Seen for an instant, and then falling back  
Into that dread abyss where evil dwells.

**IX**

And Giselher answered, "Aye, thou speakest well."

Gunter unlike was he, Gernot unlike.  
For they, the eldest brother and the third,  
Looked not for evil, ever holding good  
Mankind till proven base. But in the soul  
Of Giselher, the swart second son, distrust  
Dwelt, and suspicion ever on its guard,  
Doubt of all things in heaven and earth. For he,  
Looking within his own heart, guile beheld,  
And seeing it thus guileful and of trust  
Unworthy, deemed all others like himself.

**X**

Then from their seat beneath the ancient elm  
Arose these twain and o'er the meadows green  
Passed like a brace of vultures who, far off,  
Scent, with a loathsome glee, the field of blood.

## XIII

### HAGEN'S SOLILOQUY

#### I

“HAD I the Niblung’s Ring what wealth were  
mine!

What power illimitable, for wealth is power,  
And glittering gold the monarch of this world!  
Would, therefore, that Andvari’s Hoard were  
mine!

Not that soft luxury, or sweet delights  
Of love I crave, or state magnificent—  
Palace and park and garden such as those  
With which the Roman doth surround himself.  
These tempt not my stern soul. ’Tis power  
alone

I covet, not its pomps and vanities.  
Mine be the cold grey steel which wins the  
fight,  
Not the triumphal pageant afterward.

#### II

“When Sigurd dies, and die ere long he shall,  
I’ll seize from off his hand the Niblung’s Ring,

The golden serpent with two ruby eyes,  
The magic talisman which doth rule the Hoard.  
What wealth, what power, what joy will then be  
mine!"

## III

Thus did the envious Hagen with his soul  
Commune, and in bright dreams himself beheld  
Possessor of the Niblung's wondrous Hoard.

## XIV

### ERDA'S PROPHECY

#### I

Now Sigurd, by forebodings vague depressed,—  
For o'er his hero-soul impending doom  
Already cast its shadow,—rose by night  
And, from the homes of men far wandering,  
sought,

Within her cave upon the mountainside,  
Erda, the prophetess, that from her lips  
Inspired his lot predestined he might learn.  
Like Delphi's holy pythoness was she,  
Who, sitting on the tripod, did receive  
The oracles of the Olympian god;  
Save that with Erda did commune no god,  
Olympian nor Valhallan, but instead  
Priestess she was of that pale trinity  
Who dwell above the gods, outside of time,  
Whose will is fate immutable and who,  
Beholding the beginning and the end,  
Foreknow the lot of each created thing:  
The Norns—the mystic sisters three—who sit  
Ever beside the ash-tree Ygdrasil,

Impassive, clothed in white, rose-garlanded,  
Singing of days gone by and days to come,  
Spinning the thread of destiny—'twas they  
Who through the lips of Erda spake to men.

## II

Vault-like upon the mountainside the cave  
Of Erda opened: here, at midnight, came  
Sigurd and, kneeling in the entrance, thus  
Addressed the priestess of the mystic Norns:

## III

"Erda, thou holy one, to whom all things  
In heaven and earth are known, to whom the  
Past,  
The Present, and the Future are as one  
(For hast thou not been chosen by the Norns  
Their vicar here below?), thee I beseech  
To grant me now foreknowledge of the fate  
Which doth await me. By misgivings vague  
Depressed, my spirit fain would hear thy voice.  
Far wandering from the haunts of men by night  
My feet have sought thy sanctuary. What ill  
Knocks at my door? Is it some peril weird,  
Such as in days gone by my soul hath faced  
Unshrinking, nay, with a wild joy? Or is't  
The inevitable hour which comes to all?  
The stroke of doom? The thing which men call  
death.  
Hear me, thou holy one, and grant my prayer!"

## IV

He ceased and on the cavern's floor remained,  
Kneeling, all motionless. Then far within  
The sanctuary a light celestial dawned  
And, in its midst, before the warrior's eyes,  
Appeared, like goddess by an aureole bright  
Enveloped, Erda. Beautiful her face  
But sad; black as the raven's wing her hair;  
Her mien majestic; her tall figure robed  
In samite white, with golden cincture girt.  
As in all ages of the world hath been  
The sibyl's mystic answer (that of her  
Of Samos, who the Trojan war foretold;  
Or her of Cumæ, whom Æneas sought,  
Foreteller of the rise and fall of Rome),  
E'en such was Erda's now, as she foretold  
The death of Sigurd, and to him declared  
The future glories of the Scandian race;  
E'en such was Erda's answer now:—A voice  
Prophetic echoing in the halls of time:  
A message from the realms beyond the veil;  
Immortal purposes to mortal man  
Revealed. Thus, then, the mystic sibyl spoke:

## V

“Sigurd, thy earthly end draws near; ere rise  
The suns of many days above the Rhine,  
Upborne to high Valhalla wilt thou be  
By valkyrs fair—a warrior's obsequies.

Sigmund, thy father, and thy mother, sweet  
Siglinda, there await thee; and Gudrun,  
Thy wife belovèd, soon will thee rejoin.  
Thus, sitting by the ash-tree, speak the Norns."

## VI

A space the sibyl paused, and then went on:

## VII

"Aye, Sigurd, thou must die; but glory waits  
Thy race. Into the world's arena now,  
Fresh from his eyrie in the Scandian hills,  
Descends the Northman. His the mind robust,  
Clear as the wind-swept sky; the body his  
At home with Nature, whatsoe'er her mood,  
To sun and storm, to cold and heat inured.  
Born on the mountains, on the ocean bred,  
He knows not luxury's all-encumbering chains—  
Silken without, but links of steel beneath.  
Fain, like the eagle, would he roam for aye,  
And toward the Southland his adventurous  
flight  
He turns. There Rome aweary sits. Her  
heart  
No more ambition fires: no more her brain  
Plans conquests vast; her erstwhile puissant arm  
Droops by her side, and all unheeded hangs  
That sword the godlike Julius once did wield.  
Years weigh her Titan spirit down, for states,

Like men, grow old, and with Rome's years have come

Vast riches, ease luxurious, the command  
Of all things upon earth. Is't strange her sons,  
Once rugged, now degenerate grown, esteem  
As useless toil the storm and stress of war?

New blood the world doth need, for the world's work

Strong hands, stout hearts demands, and he who rules

This world, the wise All-Father, and doth see  
Each century's wants, hath picked from the far North

Rome's heir. The Norseman takes the Roman's place.

The sceptre to a younger race descends,  
Though masterful as were the men of Rome.  
Behold! As flow the torrents from the hills,  
What time bright Spring unlocks the Winter's clasp,

So from their Scandian homes, unceasing, flow  
The hardy Northmen o'er the Roman lands  
And, like a vivifying flood, restore  
Youth to a world effete. They come! They come!

Out of the dark northeast, from Sweden's shores,

From Norway's fiords, from Denmark's wind-swept dunes,

One people called by many names, one race

Of ocean-warriors, golden-haired they come!  
Methinks as in a dream I see them now.  
With tossing prows far out at sea beheld,  
With spears and helmets through the ocean  
mists

Flashing, they come; unheralded; with dread  
Watched by those spirits pusillanimous  
Whose purblind eyes see not in these fierce  
foes

Heaven's chosen seed, the saviours of the land.  
Wild giants they, wet with the salt sea-foam,  
But in their lives the primal virtues shine—  
Strength, courage, justice, boundless energy,  
Truth-telling, love of home, contempt of death,  
High wisdom, and all else that makes the  
man—

And through them is old Europe born again.  
As comes the spring-time back to earth, so  
comes

Once more the age heroic back to men.  
The figure of a Norseman, spear in hand,  
Crown'd with his wingèd helmet, eagle-like  
Roaming, in dragon-ship, the ocean, looms  
Above the world's horizon: I behold,  
Comrades in fame, thy vikings range them-  
selves

Beside the stalwart shapes that founded Rome,  
And hero-hosts Hellenic; and in thee,  
Sigurd, though briefer was thy life than theirs,  
Ulysses and Æneas live again.

## VIII

"But see! E'en now, on Britain's stormy shores,

Hengist and Horsa, with their sea-tost hosts,  
Land, and great England, Rome's predestined heir,

Begins her conquering march. As, in a gale,  
A mighty tidal wave, holp by the winds,  
Breaks on some isle, and overwhelms the land,  
All things submerging; so, on Britain's isle,  
The viking tide, in waves successive, breaks,  
And overflows the land; o'erflows save where,  
In west and north, the mountain fastnesses  
Of Wales and Caledonia lift their towers.

Angles, Jutes, Saxons, Norsemen, Swedes,  
Goths, Danes,

One people called by many names, one race  
Of ocean-warriors, golden-haired, they come.

A thousand years before me stretch—I see  
The wild beginnings of a nation; all  
The ferment which precedes the ordered state:  
The clash of rival clans: the jars and wars  
Of petty kingdoms, jealous of their rights:  
The inevitable struggles manifold

Which leave the fittest master. I behold  
Strong kings contending for the land: the hosts  
Of Arthur against Saxon Cerdic hurled:  
The life-long wars of Alfred with the Danes:  
The battle fierce of Brunanburgh, where strove

From morn till night, Olaf and Athelstan;  
The victories of the great Canute: and last,  
The triumph epochal, on Senlac Hill,  
Of Norman William, greatest of them all,  
Scion of Rollo's ocean-cradled race.

I see, slow-rising through the years, like tower  
Broad-based with glittering tops which seek  
the sky,

England, a realm by sea-kings' swords upbuilt.  
If thou wouldest know the soul of this fair isle,  
The well-spring of her spirit bright, behold,  
In the far North, the sources of her life!

Thy North, my Sigurd! See the choicest sons  
Of those grey coasts begirt by boreal sea,  
Their mother-lands forsaking, give their strength,  
Bequeath their spirits venturesome and brave,  
To England, in whose veins, compounded, live  
Angle, Jute, Saxon, Norman, Swede, and Dane.  
Aye, of the North's best blood is England born!

A valkyr beautiful, methinks, she stands,  
Leaning upon her spear; her golden locks  
Crown'd by the wingèd helmet—Odin's child!  
In her the viking spirit lives for aye!

In her wild Scandia flowers! Thy soul and hers,  
Sigurd, are one! By her thy youthful dream,  
To wander like some great-wing'd ocean-bird,  
Petrel or gull or tireless albatross,  
Ever and ever upon the dark blue sea—  
By her this viking dream, though lost to thee,  
Shall be fulfilled! In her thy race shall rise

To heights majestic, and men now unborn,  
Back looking through the centuries, shall  
    behold,  
In history's sky, great England shining bright  
(Twin orbs of light) beside imperial Rome!"

**IX**

The sibyl ceased, and though for further speech  
Sigurd, with eager utterance, her besought,  
She disappeared within the cavern's depths.

## XV

### THE DEATH OF SIGURD

#### I

BEYOND the Rhine, east of its silvery stream,  
Between the Neckar and the Main outstretched,  
A mighty forest lies—the Odenwald.

Leagues north and south, leagues east and west  
extends

This ancient wood, upon the sloping sides  
Of mountains lifted, or outspread in vales  
Innumerable. A rugged tract it is  
Of primal forest rooted in the rocks  
Of earlier ages: a vast wilderness  
Of woods and peaks, deep glens and sunny  
glades,

Of grass-grown summits and pellucid streams.  
Here range at will the creatures of the wild—  
The bear, the wolf, the deer, the fox, the boar.  
Here, them to slaughter, man, the hunter,  
comes.

## II

What time the summer morn in beauty breaks,  
And sing the early birds from many a bough,  
Rose Sigurd from his couch beside Gudrun,  
And for the chase began to make prepare.  
For he, that day, deep in the Odenwald  
Would hunt, with Hagen and the brothers twain,  
Gernot and Giselher. So betimes he rose.

## III

Now as, accoutred for the chase, he stood  
Within their chamber, suddenly to his side,  
A wave of radiant beauty, swept Gudrun,  
And round his puissant shoulders her white  
    arms  
Threw, and her lily face, so passing fair,  
To him uplifted, and, with troubled voice  
Beseeching him, tears in her eyes, thus spoke:

## IV

“O go not to the chase today! Last night  
Dread dreams affrighted me. I saw thee fall,  
Deep in the Odenwald, by two fierce boars  
Assailed. Thee on the sward lifeless I saw,  
Thy heart’s blood dyeing red the forest’s green.  
O go not to the chase, today, dear lord!  
Something knocks at the portals of my life  
And tells me I shall never see thee more!”

## V

So saying, on her husband's breast she laid  
Her golden head, and wept, and tightly wound  
About his neck her alabastrine arms.

## VI

Then Sigurd thus: "Something me also warns.  
Something doth tell me evil lurks ahead.  
But if 'tis Fate's decree that I should die,  
If 'tis permitted by the mighty Norns,  
What use for me, the creature of a day,  
To seek to avert the blow, to dodge my doom?  
What comes will come. None can his weird  
escape.

And who can tell? Perchance my mood is  
naught—

A passing cloudlet which upon my soul,  
But for a moment, doth its shadow cast?  
Perchance thy dream nothing doth signify?  
If so, why like a coward should I shrink  
From fancied perils? Better 'tis to live  
Free from the bonds of fear, and when the time  
Comes to depart, as fearlessly to go,  
Than of that last, inevitable hour  
Always to stand in dread. Better it is  
To die once only, not a thousand times.  
Nay, dearest, let us put aside thy dreams,  
My sad forebodings. See! The summer sun

Bathes all the landscape, and the beauteous  
Rhine  
Winds like a golden road beneath its light!  
Soon o'er those waters swift we'll make our way,  
And then, ho! for the merry greenwood tree!"

## VII

He ceased and, clasping close between his hands  
Her lily face, kissed tenderly and oft,  
As is the wont of lovers, those sweet lips,  
Now tremulous with sad solicitude.  
Then to the spacious palace grounds the twain  
Descended, she aye clinging to his side  
(Her heart in secret weeping), and there found  
Gernot and Giselher, and the gloomy knight,  
Hagen, accoutred all for the day's chase.  
Gunter alone was absent, state affairs  
His excusation, but his haughty queen  
Showed at her casement like a dark-stoled nun  
Gazing upon some scene of revelry.  
And when their fast they'd broken and good-byes  
Said the impatient sportsmen toward the Rhine  
Strode off, and soon were rowed across its  
stream.  
Steeds them awaited on the other side,  
And hounds and huntsmen at the Odenwald.

## VIII

Now when, at last, the great plain of the Rhine  
Was left behind them, and the forest's depths

They entered, gay the scene which met their eyes.

Here was the meet: here many a gallant hound  
Impatient waited, many a forester  
In wood-craft wise. Then spoke, with gestures droll,

A grizzly-bearded huntsman: this his tale.  
He in the wood had harboured a wild boar,  
An ancient solitary. Back and forth,  
From feed to lair, from lair to feed again,  
With help of hound sagacious, sure of scent,  
He'd slotted him. A monster huge he was,  
Vast as a bear, with tusks most terrible,  
Fierce as the ancient sanglier ever is.

"Aye, even as I slotted him he turned,"  
So quoth the greybeard forester, "and drove  
Me and my limehound from his leafy lair.  
But safely is he harboured now, and I  
Can put the hounds upon him easily."

## IX

Then gaily Giselher wound his hunting horn,  
And straightway he and Hagen to the spot  
Rode where the ancient sanglier lay concealed,  
And with them went the huntsmen and the hounds:

And to a sunny glade some distance off  
Rode Sigurd and young Gernot, there to wait  
The boar when he broke covert: and ere long

Came to their ears, borne down the wind, a  
blast  
Triumphal, through the greenwood echoing  
shrill—  
The horn of Hagen, telling that the hounds  
Had roused their quarry and the hunt was on.

## x

Now toward the open space where Sigurd sat  
And Gernot on their steeds the distant cry  
Seemed moving and with ready spear the twain  
Waited expectant. Nearer came the cry.  
Then suddenly they beheld, far down the  
glade,  
Swift running as a race-horse toward his  
goal,  
The ancient solitary who, in a trice,  
Turned and within the greenwood disappeared.  
Too thick for horse the tangled forest here;  
And Sigurd, from his steed dismounting, bound  
Bridle to tree and, winding his great horn  
For signal, plunged on foot into the wood.  
Gernot him followed; and the dark-browed  
knight,  
Hagen, soon coming up, with Giselher, both  
Quickly discarded horse and sought on foot  
To pierce the tangled thickets of the wood—  
By baying hounds preceded and a throng  
Of huntsmen followed, hurrying at their heels

XI

But well the ancient solitary ran—  
Swiftly and wisely—and right valiantly  
He fought too, when occasion called, that day.  
For thrice, when brought to bay by furious  
hounds,  
He charged on his pursuers and or slew  
Or maimed them, and three times he got away,  
And the third time he made good his escape  
And, all unspeared, with spirit stout, regained  
His haunts beneath the merry greenwood tree.

XII

And in the afternoon to a deep glen  
Through which, with soothing purl, a brooklet  
ran,  
Came Sigurd, wearied with the fruitless chase,  
And wandering through the interminable wood.  
And up against a linden tree his spear  
He leaned, and for a pillow took his cloak,  
And on the green moss of the wood lay down.  
And, though against his will, soft-fingered sleep  
Soon closed his eyes. So wearied out was he.

XIII

And while he slept came also to the glen  
(By cruel fate inexorable led)  
Hagen and Giselher and, with startled eyes,  
Beheld their quarry. Thus then Hagen spoke:

## XIV

"Lost is the boar, but nobler game is here!  
 Behold the son of Sigmund where he lies  
 All unaccoutred, forage for our spears!  
 What sayst thou, shall we slay him as he sleeps?"

## XV

Then Giselher: "I have heard that sharpest  
 steel  
 Pierces him not: that by the dragon's blood  
 Invulnerable made, he laughs at spears."

## XVI

To him then Hagen: "Aye, the tale is true.  
 When the black blood of Fafnir covered him,  
 What time he crouched within the narrow pit  
 And, with an upward thrust, the dragon's hide  
 Pierced, and his sword went onward to the  
 heart,  
 Forthwith invulnerable he became.  
 Yet, ne'ertheless, I'll wager my good spear,  
 Dragvandil, could right quickly finish him.  
 However, to our story let's return.  
 One spot alone is human. In one place  
 Only can enter the death-dealing dart.  
 Betwixt his shoulders had a linden leaf  
 Fallen, while in the narrow pit he stood,

Waiting, and when the blood of Fafnir bathed  
Head, limbs and trunk, the spot where lay the  
leaf,  
Alone of all his frame, remained untouched.  
This from Gudrun, in confidence, I heard;  
Who on his kirtle hath a linden leaf,  
Masked in a quaint design of branch and  
twig,  
Embroidered, covering the spot exact;  
She in her innocence beseeching me  
To guard that spot as it were my own  
heart.  
Thus foolish, Giselher, are all womankind.  
But let us to our task. Ha! He awakes.”

XVII

“Ho! Hagen! Giselher! You here? Have I  
slept?”  
Thus Sigurd, rising from his mossy couch.  
“An empty chase we’ve had, in truth! Right  
well  
Our foe, the ancient sanglier, played his game.  
But see how cool yon rivulet which runs  
Adown the dusky glen! How crystal clear  
It sparkles! Like a merry mountain nymph  
Methinks it is, and like her laughter gay  
Its rippling voice doth call me. Thirsty am I,  
And from those waters sweet fain would I  
drink.”

**XVIII**

So saying, toward the brook he strode and knelt  
Upon its sandy border with intent  
To quaff from the cool wave unmeasured  
draughts;  
Which seeing, Hagen, with a stealthy step  
(While Giselher stood a partner to the deed)  
Came up behind and, lifting high in air  
His spear, and crying, "Strike home, Drag-  
vandil!" drove  
Betwixt his victim's shoulders the bright steel.  
Swift through the broidered linden leaf it made  
Its fatal way, seeking the hero's heart.  
Alas! What grievous wound hath Sigurd now?  
No word he uttered, only a deep groan  
Of purest anguish, as upon the sand,  
Bleeding, he sank. Then straight his spirit rose  
From that rent body to Valhalla's halls.  
So, by the hand of murderer base—a deed  
Savage and senseless, born of envy—died  
The son of Sigmund, noblest of mankind.

**XIX**

Now as beside the rivulet the corse  
Of Sigurd lay, all bathed in precious blood,  
Into that place of death young Gernot came.  
He, like the others, through the wood had sought,  
Vainly, the ancient sanglier, and this glen  
Chancing upon he entered and beheld,

At first with eyes which comprehended not,  
The corse of Sigurd and, standing near by,  
Grasping within his hand a blood-stained spear,  
The giant form of Hagen. Demon like  
The murderer gazed upon his victim. Then  
Flashed on the soul of Gernot the dread truth,  
And, striding toward the dark-browed knight,  
he raised  
His spear as if to strike him. "Devil!" he  
cried,  
"What hast thou done?" But flinched the  
other not.  
"The false seducer of thy brother's wife  
I slew." Thus Hagen. "Fitter had it been  
If thou, thyself, had done it, but the deed  
On me devolved." "Thou liest!" Gernot cried,  
"I know the wretched tale. Baseless it is.  
And minded am I at this minute to strike  
Thee dead beside thy victim. But what good?  
Sigurd is gone. His light hath left this world.  
And though a thousand Hagens spilled their  
blood,  
It would not bring him back again. Alas!  
Alas! Alas! That such a dastard deed  
Should be permitted by the righteous heavens!"

### xx

He ceased and, by the body of his friend  
Kneeling, to staunch the crimson current strove;

Then bathed with water from the brook the face  
And hands of the pale corse (still warm with life  
But growing cold in death) and o'er the face  
Spread gently a blue cloak, and laid the limbs  
Orderly, and in every manner sought  
To make less terrible the ghastly sight.  
While to the dead these gentle offices  
He tendered, with a soft as woman's touch,  
Tears uncontrollable suffused his eyes.  
But ruthless stood the two conspirators.  
Cold as those others who, in Roman halls  
(What time their hands had dragged the eagle  
down),  
Watched, all unmoved, the murdered Julius  
die.

**XXI**

Now from the wood the sounds of hunting  
horns,  
Nearer approaching, came; and Giselher, them  
Noting, a blast responsive blew, and soon  
Appeared within the dusky glen a group  
Of huntsmen, glad their masters to rejoin.  
To whom then Giselher thus: "A dreadful  
thing,  
My men, hath happened. Through the forest's  
depths  
Seeking the solitary boar, we three,  
My brother Gernot, Hagen and myself,

Chanced on this gloomy glen, and here, beside  
Yon streamlet lying, as ye see him now,  
Earl Sigurd found. Covered he was with blood,  
Which from a great wound in his body flowed.  
Almost his breath had ceased. Quickly we  
strove

To staunch the crimson current and to bring  
His spirit back to earth. But 'twas in vain.  
Methinks the boar, catching him unawares,  
Hath charged upon him and its mighty tusks  
Driven into his heart. Perchance he slept,  
O'ercome by the long chase, and in his sleep  
The sanglier found and slew him. Who can  
tell?

One duty have we now. One thing alone  
Remains to do: To bear the pallid corse  
Back to his wife—our sister. From this wood  
Our arms shall sadly carry him, and thence  
A wain shall bear his body to the Rhine."

## xxii

So to the foresters the second son  
Of old King Dancreat spake, with solemn mien  
Dexterously dissembling; and forthwith  
A litter of stout beechen boughs they made,  
And on it placed, wrapped in his cloak of blue,  
The corse of Sigurd, and two foresters,  
One at his head, one at his feet, him bore  
From out the wood, preceded by the rest

Marching with mournful tread, and followed  
slow

By the two royal brothers and that knight  
Whose name henceforth, through cycles long of  
time,

The stain of this base murder was to bear.

## XVI

### BESIDE THE RHINE

#### I

Now on the banks of Rhine a funeral pyre  
Did Sigurd's vikings rear, and on it placed—  
Robed in rich garb, and wearing wingèd helm  
And byrnies bright, as if for battle drest—  
The body of their chief; and by his side  
His sword they would have laid, that wondrous  
brand

Which Odin from Valhalla's halls had brought  
To Volsung's son and later Regin's skill,  
Welding the mystic shards, had forged anew;  
But them Gudrun besought with flowing tears  
To grant it her, last relic of her lord;  
So into her fair hands was Gram bestowed.

#### II

For when the pyre was ready and from out  
Gudrun's dark bower the silent Scandians bore  
The corse of Sigurd Jarl, them close behind,  
A black-veiled, faltering figure, came Gudrun,

Followed by weeping damsels of her bower.  
And came also unto the banks of Rhine  
The king, begirt with knights; and the pale  
queen,  
Brynhild, the valkyr, by her damosels  
Attended; and the brothers of the king,  
Giselher and Gernot; and that warrior grim,  
Hagen yclept, of evil all compact,  
The ruthless instrument of cruel fate.  
And likewise came a motley multitude  
Of divers sorts, soldiers and citizens,  
Rough farmers with their wives and progeny,  
And lads and lassies in life's April still,  
All flocking to the banks of Father Rhine,  
There to behold the Norseman's obsequies.  
And when beside the flood his vikings laid  
Their chieftain's body, ere upon the pyre  
They placed it and the funeral flame applied,  
Forth glided from among her maids Gudrun,  
And by the bier, like a swift-moving wraith,  
Sank down, and round the lifeless body claspt  
Her beauteous arms, as if she wildly sought  
To summon back, by love importunate,  
Into that broken vessel cold, erstwhile  
Its dwelling place, her lord's departed ghost.  
And thus, beside the bier burst forth Gudrun:

## III

“Dark, dark my life! What now to me is  
earth?

What now the beauteous Rhine, upon whose banks

While love sang in the tree-tops, once we walked?

Thrice poignant is my pain as on each spot

Made sacred by our happiness I gaze!

Here once was mine joy inexpressible!

Here now, alas, with anguish bleeds my heart!

Woe lays on me his heavy hand and Grief

Invests my spirit with his inky pall.

Gone, gone my love! Gone, gone earth's noblest soul!

Fair font from which life-giving draughts I drank!

Gone are those eyes which lit for me the world!

That voice whose music did my heart enthrall!

Those lips from which sweet sustenance I drew!

Gone is my mate—within whose arms was heaven—

My other half. For like a noble tree

We grew, one substance, till an angry bolt

Of lightning rent our wedded life in twain;

And on the ground he lies, blackened and dead,

And I, the other half, live on alone,

Yet scarcely live, a mutilated shape,

Standing upon the melancholy wold,

To bear my cruel scars until the end."

#### IV

She ceased and, kneeling still beside the bier,

Kissed o'er and o'er again the lifeless lips

Of that which was her loving husband once—  
The pallid clay where once the spirit dwelt.  
Then on his bosom, weeping, bowed her head.  
And o'er the bier her tresses, loosed in woe,  
Swept like a golden coverlet to the ground.

## V

Then from the Norsemen's midst a figure tall  
Of noble aspect, helmeted, and drest  
In raiment rich, befitting his high rank,  
Strode slowly forth, and stood before the  
king—

Hakon the son of Halfdan, of the *Bear*  
The captain, and the warrior upon whom,  
Earl Sigurd being dead, command devolved.  
And thus, while on his every accent hung  
The vast assemblage, Gunter he addressed:

## VI

“Sad are our hearts, O King! Us have the  
Norns  
A blow o'erpowering dealt. And though, like  
men,  
We strive to bear the buffetings of Fate,  
Yet like this weeping widow's is our woe.  
Sigurd is dead! Slain is the blameless one!  
The noble son of Sigmund is no more!  
The flower of all the North has passed away!

**VII**

"Strange doth it seem to us who knew him well  
That he could have an enemy, that in all  
This world of men lived one who loved him not.  
And yet it must be so. His gaping wound  
Promulgates unto all the dreadful truth.  
Foul murder hath been done. By hand of man  
He fell, and not by tusk of the wild boar.  
By dastard spear and not in honest strife.  
But to the perpetrator of this crime  
We hold no clue. If 'twere not so, if we  
Could name the assassin, swiftly should his  
blood  
Atonement make; e'en though each one of us  
Thereafter died, all falling where we fought.

**VIII**

"Yet thee, King Gunter, do we guiltless hold;  
Knowing that thou didst love him like ourselves;  
Knowing that on thy spirit sorrow sits,  
As on the souls of each of us, a bird  
Gigantic, shutting out the air and light;  
Knowing that thou wilt mourn him till the end.

**IX**

"Farewell! When we to his belovèd corse  
Have paid our final homage, and the rites  
Ordained by the Immortals have performed,

And in the flame hath vanished his dear clay,  
Down the swift Rhine, from out thy realm, O  
King,  
We'll pass, and thou shalt see us never more.  
Back to our Northland ocean-haunted, back  
To that gray Scandia whence we came, we'll go.  
Aye, homesick is my heart! Farewell, farewell!"

**X**

He ceased and, from the presence of the king  
Withdrawing, joined once more his mariners,  
Bidding them place the body on the pyre.  
Then was it that Gudrun the chief besought  
To grant her Gram, last relic of her lord,  
That wondrous brand which Odin once had  
grasped.  
So into her fair hands was Gram bestowed.

**XI**

Now when upon the lofty pyre was laid  
The corse of Sigurd, ere the funeral flame,  
Which changeth clay to ashes, had been lit,  
Forth from her ladies came, with stately step  
(While wonderment the vast assemblage held),  
Brynhild the valkyr, Gunter's haughty queen,  
And standing by the fateful pyre thus spoke:

## XII

"Hakon, thy words are wise. Like thine my heart

Homesick doth languish. As an eagle caged  
Doth ever of the boundless mountains dream,  
So dream I ever of my valkyr days.

Life here to me is naught: aye, worse than  
naught.

As to that captive eagle, though his cage  
Be golden, death doth come as a release,  
So to my soul comes death a sweet release.

When, freed from earthly bonds, my happy  
ghost

Hath risen to Valhalla, there these eyes  
My father Odin shall behold once more.  
There waits he me. There, as in bygone days,  
His loving arms shall fold me to his breast.  
My fault forgiven. Expiation done."

## XIII

She ceased and, with uplifted countenance,  
Gazed at the heavens for a little space,  
As though her eyes beheld, in that blue dome,  
The figure of her father, Odin great,  
Standing as in the lonely isle he stood,  
What time with waving spear and magic rune  
(While in his heart reigned grief ineffable)  
He wove the spell about her and the flames,

Commanded to protect her from all harm.  
Thus for a little time the valkyr stood.  
Then, while the multitude looked on with awe,  
And in amaze stood Gunter and his court,  
The lofty pyre she mounted and, beside  
The corse of Sigurd kneeling, swiftly drove  
A diamond-hilted dagger to her heart.

**XIV**

Thus passed from earth into Valhallan air  
Brynhild, that daughter whom the god supreme  
Above all others loved. A glorious soul  
Clothed in the beauty of the starry night.

**XV**

And side by side upon the lofty pyre  
This noble twain the bearded Norsemen laid—  
Sigurd and Brynhild; and Earl Hakon bade  
The logs be lighted, and a mighty flame,  
Fanned by the wind, sprang up, and in the  
flame  
Swiftly their mortal bodies were consumed.

## INTERLUDE

AWAKE, ye shapes heroic, once again!  
Sigurd hath passed—and Brynhild—and above,  
In high Valhalla, linger; but Gudrun  
And all the race Burgundian still remain  
And walk the ways of earth; and Hagen base,  
With blood-stained spirit, broods beside the  
Rhine.  
And lo, on Hungary's plains, where now doth sit  
Vienna fair, behold a motley mass  
Mongolian, of great Attila the hordes.  
Him likewise sing, O Muse, for though uncouth  
Of body, in his Orient soul the flame  
Of genius dwelt, and the fierce instrument  
Of Fate he was our Sigurd to avenge.



**Book II.** *Attila*



# I

## HAGEN AND ANDVARI

### I

“SIGURD is dead. The Niblung’s Ring is mine.  
Far from these shores the wandering Norsemen  
now.

Pestiferous crew. Save that this magic Ring  
They’ve left me, I could wish their gold-prowed  
ships,

Their sailors rude and captains insolent,  
Had ne’er disturbed the peace of Burgundy.  
But hist! To the point! The Ring! The  
Niblung’s Ring!

Ha! Ha! How like a talisman rare indeed,  
A wonder-working thing beyond compare,  
It shines upon my hand. Thou circlet bright,  
Thou baleful serpent with the ruby eyes,  
Now will I test thy vaunted potency!  
Appear, Andvari, servant of the Ring!  
Appear, thou Niblung knave, thy master calls!”

### II

Thus Hagen, by the swiftly-rushing Rhine  
(What time the midnight brooded o’er the earth)

Communed with his dark soul. Then swiftly  
raised  
The glittering circlet to his bearded lips.

**III**

As through the air a radio message flies,  
Needing no wire, by Nature's laws propelled,  
So through the midnight, to the Niblung's cave,  
This message of the knight Burgundian flew,  
Now the possessor of the magic Ring.  
And by a power occult the Niblung dwarf,  
A wizard skilful, mounted to the sky,  
And, like a bird, the silent ether clove,  
Bending his swift flight toward the German  
land.  
Soon o'er the Rhine he hovered; then, like a  
hawk  
Gigantic, swooping suddenly on his prey,  
Descended and the haughty Hagen faced.

**IV**

"Who calleth me? Who art thou that the Ring  
Possesseth? In the cavern where I toil;  
I and my gnomes, by the far Northern sea,  
I heard thy call and came. Nay, not from choice  
I came, but at the summons of the Ring.  
Who art thou, swarthy shape? Methinks the  
gem

Unwittingly hath worked its curse, and crime  
Hath been committed. Sigurd, where is he?  
How camest thou by this Ring? Thou that dost  
show

Sigurd beside, as shows the gloomy night  
Beside the golden ever-beauteous morn.  
Methinks thy hands with Sigurd's blood are  
red."

## v

Thus scornful spake the Niblung and to him  
Hagen, with accents furious, thus replied:

## vi

"Cease, dwarf, thy idle talk. What is't to thee  
If Sigurd lives or dies? What is't to thee  
Whose finger wears the Ring since 'tis not thine?  
All else is naught. Why then this empty  
noise?

He rules the world who holds the Niblung's  
Ring.

The treasures of that vast abode are his—  
The unmined metals of the Niblung's cave—  
Riches incalculable. This well thou knowest.  
All—all unto the mystic Ring belong.

Whence comes that power we know not, but we  
know—

I, thou, and all men—that the Ring's command—  
Implacable as Fate—must be obeyed.

Bring forth thy gold then, that my hungry eyes  
May with each glittering coin disport them-  
selves."

## VII

"Hagen thou art. I know thee now. A name  
Accurst forevermore. Yet to the Ring  
I yield because I must. Would that once more  
It shone upon my hand! Alas! Alas!  
Perchance some day a woman's palm may hold  
This stolen circlet and a woman's heart,  
That prizes love and justice more than gold,  
May give it back to me. What wouldest thou  
have?"

## VIII

Thus, sorrowing, spoke Andvari; and to him  
Hagen, the knight Burgundian, thus replied:

## IX

"What would I have? A galley filled with  
gold.

A ship with treasure laden. Aye, not one,  
But many ships. To thy far distant North  
Fain would I go, myself, if youth were mine,  
And see with mine own eyes that wondrous  
Hoard.

But now? It ne'er can be. Come, mystic  
dwarf,

A bargain let us make. Every five years  
A galley filled with treasure shalt thou send  
From Thule's shores to Burgundy. Thy gnomes,  
To whom the secrets of the earth and air  
And ocean vast are as an open book,  
Shall man the bark and o'er the boreal seas  
Shall bring the treasure safely to the Rhine.  
I'll trust them, if they come by thy command.  
Easy it is if thou dost say the word."

## x

To whom the dwarf, with scornful voice, replied:  
"Greedy as ancient Hreidmar's is thy soul;  
Greedy as Fafnir's; and like theirs shall be  
Thy wretched end. Much gold hath made thee  
mad.

But 'tis the Norns' decree; those sisters fair  
Who high above the gods of Asgard sit,  
Rose-garlanded, in snowy samite gowned,  
Sweet music singing, yet implacable.  
By them my prayer was heard—my bitter  
curse—

By them 'twas justified; and though they loved  
Bright Sigurd, yet the tainted gold he held,  
And on him, blind as one of Nature's laws,  
The ancient curse descended and he fell.  
But thou, who didst the son of Sigmund slay—  
The flower of all the North—with dastard hand,  
Robber and murderer base art thou in one;

And if at aught they can rejoice, those Norns,  
Who do but execute, with heart unmoved,  
And smiling lip, inexorable law,  
Rejoice they will when thou dost meet thy  
doom.

Aye, aye, the ships I'll send; but ere the first  
Quinquenniad close methinks thy cumbrous  
form,

Hateful to all men, will have passed away.

Already, in that desolate abode  
Where dwells the evil-doer after death,  
Pale Hela, goddess of the underworld,  
Hath marked thee for her own and doth devise  
Pains punitive thy many crimes to fit.  
Aye, whither couldst thou go if not to her  
Whose province is the punishment of sin?  
Valhalla wants thee not, thou monstrous  
soul.

There only dwell the good, the wise, the  
great,

Companions of the bright and blessed gods.  
But thou, of every evil thing compact,  
Downward thy ghost shall wander to its place.  
Upon that shadowy highway which descends,  
Through depths terrene, to Hela's drear abode  
(What time thy soul, by the avenger's sword,  
Is parted from its clay), upon that road,  
Perchance with trembling malefactors chained,  
There next I'll see thee, Hagen, and my voice  
Shall hail thee ere the gates behind thee close."

## XI

So saying, through the gloomy ether rose  
(As rises into air an eagle vast)  
The Niblung dwarf, and soon was lost to sight.

## XII

But Hagen only laughed, like Hreidmar old  
And Fafnir, and, upon the fatal Ring  
Gazing with greedy exultation, cried:  
“The gold is mine—at last the gold is mine.”

## II

### GUDRUN'S LAMENT

#### I

Now mourned Gudrun for Sigurd many days—  
Days, months and years—and when three years  
had passed

Still, to her heart, it seemed but yesternight  
Since home they brought her gallant warrior  
dead.

But whether dead from accident or plot,  
Through hand of man or tusk of boar, by spear  
Of murderer base, or terrible assault  
Of wild beast fiercely fighting for his home,  
She knew not. Only this her spirit knew,  
That he who once was hers, was hers no more  
(Not hers, at least, in earth's habiliments,  
Though oft she seemed to feel his presence near):  
That husbandless she dwelt. One joy alone  
Lighted her life, an infant posthumous,  
A baby boy with Sigurd's golden hair,  
And Sigurd's eyes, and Sigurd's loving ways,  
And on this boy were centred all her thoughts,  
And round him all her hopes and fears revolved,

E'en as the planets circle round the sun.  
And when, at night, within her silent room,  
She knelt in prayer, communing with the realms  
Celestial, seeking surcease of her woe,  
Oft did it seem to her that Sigurd stood  
Beside her, and full comforted she rose,  
Strengthened in spirit from her orisons.  
And thus, as by her sleeping babe she knelt,  
She sought communion with the loved and lost.

## II

"Dear one, where art thou gone, who once with  
me,  
In happier days, abode? In what bright  
heaven  
Where gods and goddesses immortal dwell,  
And golden halls celestial greet the eye,  
Dwellst thou, my Sigurd? Or in what fair land  
Elysian, where the good and great of earth,  
After the toils and troubles of this world,  
Wander in meadows sweet of asphodel,  
Abidest thou? Ah, though fair that land may  
be,  
Though fair and sweet, I know to thee 'tis  
naught  
Gudrun without—without thy loving wife.  
Or, peradventure, still thy gentle ghost  
Beside me dwells, refusing to be gone,  
Protecting me as in the days of old?

I know not—all is mystery—for a wall  
Hides from our eyes the world beyond the grave.  
And yet, methinks, though by this earthly sight  
Unseen, and by these earthly ears unheard,  
Oft do our loved ones visit us, and oft  
The immortal soul doth with its mate commune.  
Ah, how could it be otherwise when love  
Hath made two spirits one? Perchance, e'en  
now,  
My Sigurd, though bereft of earthly frame,  
Hears me and kneels beside me as of old?"

## III

Thus, mourning for her husband, prayed Gudrun.

### III

## CLAUDIUS

#### I

CLAUDIUS, the Roman, of great Attila  
The envoy, waited at King Gunter's court;  
Sent hither by the imperial Hun to seek  
The hand in marriage of the fair Gudrun;  
But, up till now, though thrice ten days had  
passed,  
All unavailing seemed his every plea.

#### II

How came a noble Roman, groomed with care,  
And proud of race, and skilled in phrase polite,  
To be the envoy of the barbarous Hun?

#### III

Captured in battle was he and condemned  
To cruel death; but Attila, by chance,  
Beheld him, and within that savage breast  
Pity upsprang, to kill a youth so fair;  
So freed he was from fetters and became

A son, almost, of the wild potentate.  
For Claudius, filled with gratitude, drew near  
To Attila in spirit and discerned  
(Holp by the lamp of close companionship)  
Beneath the outer mask the inner man,  
Beneath the warrior's will the dreamer's mood,  
Beneath the nomad's helm the monarch's mind,  
And clave, through thick and thin, to Attila.  
And thrice, in furious battle, did he save  
His master's life, and oft in camp and court  
From the assassin's hidden, snake-like blade,  
Him shielded, watching all men like a lynx.  
And Attila, begirt with crafty spies,  
And would-be murderers—all the network base  
Which seeks to trap the ruler of a realm—  
Madmen, fanatics, wild adventurers,  
Villains gold-bought, deemed only Claudius true,  
Whom all the wealth of Indus could not bribe,  
And loved him more and more and, in the end,  
Trusted the Roman and none other soul.

## IV

Now in his tent beside the Danube sat  
The Hunnish king and, near at hand, with style  
And tablets busy, Claudius silent worked—  
Scribe, counsellor and diplomat in one.  
And ever and anon his task he ceased  
For converse with the king, and then went on.  
And now, the writing finished, Attila called

For Roman wine and, while they drank, to them  
Otho, a Gothic harper, sang and played.

## V

Many his themes, but most of all he sang  
Sigurd, the son of Sigmund, and his deeds—  
Pride of the Volsung race—flower of the North;  
And how he Fafnir slew, the dragon fierce,  
And made the Niblung's mighty Hoard his own;  
And won the mystic Ring that rules the Hoard;  
And sought, through circling fire, the valkyr  
maid,  
Brynhild, whom Odin, father of the gods,  
Above all others loved; and how, returned  
To Burgundy, the lily maid Gudrun  
He wedded, sister of a noble king;  
And how, at last, deep in the Odenwald,  
Slain by a boar, he fell; but ah, perchance  
'Twas not a boar, but envious enemies  
Who laid him low. So all the people said.  
Dark enemies who slew him as the night  
Blots out the golden vivifying sun.  
Thus sang that Gothic minstrel, from his harp  
Plucking, meanwhile, a weird accompaniment.

## VI

Then Attila: “Whence gottest thou this tale,  
Harper? Methinks 'tis strange yet beautiful!”

**VII**

And Otho answered: "At King Gunter's court,  
In Burgundy, beside the silvery Rhine.  
Here still his sister dwells, the fair Gudrun,  
The lily Princess of a saddened realm,  
With one bright boy, and mourns her murdered  
mate.

For murdered do I think he was, my liege,  
Slain not by tusk of boar but spear of man."

**VIII**

And Attila the minstrel praised, and gold  
Gave him, and low he bowed before the king;  
Then lifted up his harp and from the tent  
Passed out, and went upon his wandering way.  
But though no more that bard the monarch saw  
The tale remained, nor could he from his mind  
Dismiss it. Long it haunted him. At last  
To Claudius, friend and counsellor, thus he  
spoke:

**IX**

"The harper's tale doth haunt me. In my  
dreams  
I see the noble Sigurd slain. Methinks  
'Tis true what say the folk. Murdered was he.  
By spear of man and not by tusk of boar  
He perished in the depths of Odenwald.  
By the just gods, this kingly hand of mine,

Though to him stranger, shall his death avenge;  
For all brave men are brothers, and to rid  
The world of evil-doers is their task.  
And this sweet widow—better 'twere, me-  
thinks,  
If she were mine. Another arm she needs  
(Bright Sigurd being gone) her to protect,  
And keep at bay the dastards of the realm.  
For this I fear, if Otho's tale be true,  
The hand that slew her husband threatens her."

**X**

He ceased, and on the yellow Danube gazed  
Silent a space, then suddenly spoke again:  
"In thee, alone, my Claudius, do I trust.  
Go thou to Burgundy, to Gunter's court;  
Go thou and say that Attila the Hun,  
Ruler of half the world and soon to be  
Ruler of all, doth seek the royal hand  
Of Gunter's widowed sister, fair Gudrun.  
Perchance successful wilt thou be, perchance  
Not so; but this I know, that if the thing  
Can be accomplished thou, and thou alone,  
Canst do it. Go. And may the mystic gods  
Who rule fair women's hearts, grant thee suc-  
cess."

## IV

### THE APPARITION

#### I

Now as, within her chamber, prayed Gudrun,  
At midnight's hour (when oft the dead do walk),  
Kneeling, as was her wont, beside her babe,  
She felt a presence near her and her eyes  
Uplifting she beheld, not far away,  
Drest as he was upon that fatal morn  
When last, a living shape, her wifely eyes  
Had seen him, all accoutred for the chase,  
With spear in hand, the figure of her lord,  
Sigurd, her murdered mate. But pallid now  
That soul-illumined face, by sunny locks  
Enframed, and sad that music-making voice,  
Whose accents well she knew. And thus he  
spoke:

#### II

"Dost mourn for me beloved? Know that I  
Do ever dwell beside thee, though to eyes  
Of earth invisible; know that my arm

Doth ever strive to guard thee, though none see  
Its mystical defence. But to discourse  
With earthly voice, as men and women do,  
To speak with thee as in the days gone by,  
Is seldom granted by the mighty gods.  
Nor is it oft permitted unto souls  
Disbodied and cut off to reappear  
Clothed in the flesh and earth's habiliments,  
E'en as they lived and loved and strove and  
fought.

But me the almighty gods, compassionate,  
Have granted this rare boon, that I a wrong  
Grievous might to thy innocent ears disclose,  
And, peradventure, might by timely words  
Another wrong, thrice dastardly, avert.  
List! list! While hunting in the Odenwald  
(Hagen, thy brother Giselher and myself)  
By Hagen was I slain, his treacherous spear  
Piercing the vulnerable spot o'er which,  
Upon my kirtle, all too carefully,  
Thou, with thy loving hands, a linden leaf  
Didst broider. All approving Giselher stood,  
A partner to the deed. But not of him,  
Thy brother, will I speak. The mighty gods,  
Themselves, will judge his perfidy, not I.  
But Hagen, base, inhuman wretch, 'tis he  
My lips, e'en from the spirit world, denounce.  
Me having slain his avaricious hand  
Tore from my fingers cold the Niblung's Ring,  
Which long his heart had coveted. This ring

Still doth he hold, and with it doth control  
The countless treasures of the Niblung dwarf,  
Andvari, of whose Hoard these lips of mine  
Have often told thee. Unto thee belongs,  
By right, this Ring; to thee, my widow. Yet  
Fearful am I to see this circlet bright  
Upon thy hand, Gudrun; for on it rests,  
As well thou knowest, Andvari's dreadful curse.  
So let it go—it and its baneful gold.  
But stopped not Hagen here. His evil soul  
More wrong contemplates, and to slay my child,  
My child and thine, seeks opportunity.  
Watch therefore—watch Gudrun, and to the  
gods  
Unceasing pray, that we may save our son,  
For all compact of evil is the soul  
Of Hagen, and in every evil thing  
Delights—the offspring base, abhorrible,  
Of that dark spirit whom the blessed gods  
Banished forever from the realms of light—  
Loki, to whom all wickedness is good."

## III

He ceased and, ere Gudrun could find a voice  
(For motionless in silent awe she knelt),  
Gone was he, and thrice empty seemed the room.

## V

## GUDRUN'S SOLILOQUY

## I

"HAGEN my husband's murderer! Is it strange  
My heart hath ever hated him? And yet,  
Though vague suspicion oft did point that way,  
The deed was never proved. But now I know.  
Sigurd, my darling, time it was to speak.  
Thou knewest Hagen's crime and, knowing that,  
Thy spirit eyes have seen where mine were  
blind.

Thy spirit voice hath warned me. Now I see.  
For Hagen, fearing if his crime were known  
My tongue would rouse the people into wrath,  
Or that my boy, to manhood grown, perchance  
Might learn the dastard story and revenge  
His father's murder, fain would slay us both.  
But even if he nothing feared, still true,  
As in past centuries, is the adage old—  
'The injurer ever hates the injured one,  
The wronger hates the one whom he has  
wronged.'

Girt round about with secret enemies,

With dangers unsuspected, is my life.  
But where to turn for safety? Ah, the Hun!  
A light breaks over me! As his wife—his  
queen—  
What hand could harm me—me or my dear  
babe!  
Methinks e'en wicked Hagen would be foiled.  
Safe, safe I'd be. Safe, safe. Perchance 'tis  
this  
My Sigurd meant. Methinks his spirit hand  
Pointed this way. Darling, is this thy wish?  
None other can I ever love but thee,  
And never have I dreamed of other mate,  
As well thou knowest, who doth know my  
heart.  
But Attila, he asks not love. My hand  
Alone he seeks, as sovereigns ever do.  
'No,' hitherto I've said, when Claudius sought  
An answer to his suit; but now my mind  
Is changed, and changed the current of my  
thought;  
And 'Yes,' tomorrow, shall my answer be."

## II

Thus did the fair Gudrun with her own soul  
Hold colloquy, seeking to save her son.

## VI

### ATTILA AND GUDRUN

#### I

“WOULDST know my life, fair bride? I'll tell it thee.

Sit still, and while thou weavest on thy loom,  
And back and forth thy busy fingers move,  
My lips shall weave the story of the past.”

#### II

Thus Attila unto the fair Gudrun  
As in her bower they sat—none other near—  
Nor courtier smooth, nor damsel of her train.  
A hanging rare with divers coloured threads  
She wrought, whereon her husband's mighty  
deeds,

The mighty deeds of Attila the Hun,  
Were broidered; and, as busily she wrought,  
Unto her thus the royal bridegroom spoke:

#### III

“Knowest thou the East? My spirit's source  
is there.

Knowest thou the East? There is my spirit's home.

In that far land, in uttermost Cathay,  
Behold the springs from which I draw my life!  
O'er those vast plains which like the ocean roll,  
Illimitable, where the Peiho threads  
His winding way, and flows the Sungari,  
O'er those vast plains, windswept and desolate,  
O'er those mid-Asian wildernesses dun,  
O'er Gobi's sands and by the blue Baikal,  
For centuries did my Mongol forbears roam—  
Uncounted generations—nomads rude,  
Content, ambitionless—naught knowing save  
The lore of flocks and herds,—of sheep and goats,  
Of horses and of cattle; till, at last,  
Dawned a new day momentous when they sensed  
The West; and as a brightly burning lamp  
All wandering things attracts, so Rome drew  
them.

Then to the setting sun their horses' heads  
They turned, and toward the sunset each day  
rode—

A million horses by a million men  
Bestrode, with wives and bairns a million more—  
A million men and horses did I say?  
Nay, many millions, a host uncountable—  
Thick as the sands on Gobi's desert waste.  
A motley, slowly-moving mass—a swarm  
Of locusts swallowing up the fertile land  
And leaving desolation in their wake,

A horde of cruel savages unwashed.  
And thus they rode until the gates of Rome,  
After long years, they reached, and here they  
stopped—

Here where the yellow Danube barred the way.  
And here, beside the Danube, was I born,  
One of two brothers; but my brother died,  
Bleda by name, and I was king acclaimed.  
And hence into my hands the Hunnish realms  
Far-reaching came, for from the Danube's flood  
Eastward they stretch unto the ends of the  
earth—

Cathay the flowery, and the Orient sea.  
For here, where now thou sittest, is Hungary,  
The land of the Huns; and there, just over there,  
Beyond the yellow Danube's rushing flood,  
Is Rome, the golden mistress of the world.  
Aye, here is Hungary and there is Rome,  
And swift the yellow Danube flows between.”

## IV

He ceased a little space and then went on:

## V

“Strange is the fate which hath directed us,  
The fate which hath our lives together joined.  
The East and West do meet in us, Gudrun,  
Europe art thou and Asia old am I,  
But, East or West, Love's ways are all the same.

Thee did I love when thou wast but a dream,  
 A vision of the mind, a woeful wraith,  
 Born of a wandering harper's tragic tale,  
 Who Sigurd sang, and his untimely end,  
 And that sweet widow, crushed and desolate.  
 Thee did I love, and sought, as lovers will,  
 To aid thee in thy danger and distress,  
 And therefore sent I Claudius to thy side.  
 But now that I have seen thee as thou art,  
 How fairer than an angel's is thy face,  
 How golden as the sunshine is thy hair,  
 How passing sweet thou art, how beautiful,  
 I know that more than aught else in this world  
 Thou art to me. Tell me, thou dearest one,  
 Tell me, if not too painful to thy heart,  
 And fitting seems the hour, how Sigurd died."

## VI

Thus Attila, and thus to him Gudrun:

## VII

"Deep in the Odenwald he died, my lord,  
 Hunting the boar. Aye, home they brought  
 him, dead.  
 Slain by the boar, they said. But I—my lord—  
 I think not so. Slain by a villain base  
 Was he, who even now doth seek my life,  
 And that of my young child—my baby boy.  
 Prove it I cannot—nay, my lord—and yet  
 Sure am I as I live that this is so."

## VIII

Thus spoke Gudrun. Then, to her husband's  
plea

Yielding, she opened all her stricken heart,  
And told him how, as in her bower she knelt,  
At midnight, had the ghost of Sigurd come—  
A pallid wraith from out the spirit world—  
And to her ears the dreadful truth disclosed.  
How, as within the deepest Odenwald  
They rested, Hagen, Giselher and himself,  
By Hagen was he slain, the treacherous spear  
Piercing the vulnerable spot o'er which,  
Upon his kirtle, had her loving hands  
A linden leaf embroidered. How, well pleased,  
Her brother stood, a partner to the deed.  
How from the hand of Sigurd, e'en ere death  
Had stilled it, Hagen tore the Niblung's Ring  
Enchanted—aye, enchanted, but accurst—  
The mystic Ring which rules the Niblung's  
Hoard.

How, even now, fearing lest his base deed  
Might be discovered, Hagen sought the life  
Of her, Gudrun, and of her baby boy.

"Aye, 'twas to warn me that bright Sigurd  
came

(For whom the almighty gods, compassionate,  
Set on one side the laws of heaven and earth),  
To warn me of my peril imminent.

Drest as he was upon that fatal morn

When last, a living shape, these eyes of mine  
Had seen him, all accoutred for the chase,  
With spear in hand, so now to me he showed,  
An apparition strange and pitiful."

**IX**

Thus spake Gudrun. Then into bitter tears  
Broke, as upon her husband's breast she laid  
That golden head of beauty exquisite.

**X**

Then Attila: "'Tis as the harper said.  
'Tis as my prescient spirit did surmise.  
But safe thou art, my dearest one. Fear not.  
Potent the arm of Attila the Hun.  
Strong to protect and terrible to strike.  
No man of woman born can harm thee now.'"

## VII

### WESTWARD HO

#### I

“TOMORROW shall we westward move, Gudrun,  
And once again thine eyes shall see the Rhine,  
And Burgundy, thy home. And thou to me  
Shalt show the places thou didst love so well—  
Thy garden where the crimson roses bloom,  
The wooded path beside the silvery Rhine,  
And all the other haunts thy girlhood loved.  
These shall I see; and I shall love them too.”

#### II

Thus Attila unto his queen—then rose  
And from her bower passed out upon the plain,  
Now filled with hubbub and confusion loud,  
As for their march his warriors made prepare.  
And soon among his men, so fast he moved,  
The figure of the king was lost to sight.  
And long beside the window sat Gudrun  
Watching the scene, to her so passing strange.  
For far as eye could reach the rolling plain  
Was peopled, and between long lines of tents  
A mighty multitude, unceasing, moved.

And here were horsemen riding to and fro  
With frantic haste, on varied errands bent;  
And shouting squadrons ready for the fray,  
And wheeling wildly in a mimic war.  
And here were revels gay, of reckless ones  
On whom life lightly sat, and partings sad  
Of men from maids, of husbands from their  
wives,  
Of fathers from their children, for behind,  
On Hungary's plain, beside the Danube's wave  
Must womanhood and childhood wait and weep.  
Aye, here were care and bawl and  
pain,  
And many a tearful eye and breaking heart,  
For though the garb be motley yet a heart  
May beat and break beneath, and of one soul  
Are lord and lackey, servitor and prince.

### III

And thus, beside her window, mused Gudrun.  
“Ye shapes fantastic, from the Asian steppes  
Far wandering, whither do ye go? What fate  
Awaits the pleasant land of Burgundy?”  
Thus mused Gudrun as from her bower she  
viewed  
The horsemen fierce of Attila the Hun.

### IV

And on the morrow, at the break of day,  
Set forth the Hunnish king and toward the West,

E'en as his sires had done before him, marched.  
And like the sea when far from land we sail,  
And naught on every side is visible—  
North, south, east, west—but ceaseless-moving  
waves,  
So did the hosts of Attila appear,  
Ceaselessly moving, covering all the plain,  
Rising and falling like the restless sea.  
A myriad horsemen following the sun,  
A myriad lances glittering in the air,  
A myriad waves upon a boundless sea.  
And thus they rode until the Rhine they reached.  
And here they halted, and once more Gudrun  
Beheld the silvery stream she loved so well.

## V

Then sent the Hunnish king a message forth.  
Greetings to Gunter, King of Burgundy,  
From Attila, the king of kings. And this  
The substance of the message—to a feast  
Was Gunter bidden, he and all his court;  
For thus the royal Hun his friendly heart  
Would show to one and all in Burgundy.

## VI

Splendid, methinks, will the occasion be—  
A feast to Gunter, King of Burgundy,  
Tendered by Attila, the king of kings!

## VIII

### THE HALL OF ATTILA (INCLUDING CLAUDIUS'S STORY)

#### I

THE hall of Attila, the king of kings!  
A Roman palace had it been, but now  
The Hun doth ride where once the Roman ruled,  
And where the togaed praetor dwelt in state,  
Now swarm the horsemen from the Scythian  
steppes.

#### II

The night of nights! In the great banquet hall  
Burgundian now and Hun together sit—  
Together sit and in fair concord feast.  
A merry sight it is, yet strange, methinks—  
The East and West in medley mingled here—  
The bold Burgundians, yellow-haired and tall,  
The Hunnish troopers, short and dark, with eyes  
Mongolian, such as by the Orient Sea,  
In far and fabulous Cathay belong.  
Yet side by side the nut-brown ale they drink,

And loud the laughter is and gay the song,  
For where old Bacchus leads, a joyous crew  
Follows, and rosy run the sands of time.

## III

High on the dais sitting now behold  
The Hunnish king, a monarch without peer,  
Omnipotent; and by his side his queen,  
Gudrun the beautiful; and near at hand  
Gunter of Burgundy, the honoured guest,  
And likewise Hagen, and the brothers twain,  
Gernot and Giselher; and not far away  
Claudius the Roman; and on either side,  
Stretching to right and left of the king's seat,  
Great guests innumerable—a glittering host  
Of vassal kings, and Hunnish officers,  
And rulers high, and friends from far and near,  
And many a lady fair. And round the board  
The smoking viands pass, and gay the guests  
Quaff the red wine of Attila the Hun.

## IV

Now when the buzz and laughter of the feast  
Were loudest, and the rosy wine of Rome  
Freest did flow, upon the oaken board,  
With dagger's jewelled hilt, the Hunnish king  
Thrice rapped, and silence fell upon the throng.  
Then thus spake Attila, the king of kings.

## V

"A story let us have. What say ye, friends?  
A tale, perchance, of Burgundy or Rome.  
Our Claudius here shall tell it; for, indeed,  
I know of none upon this earth more skilled  
In song or war, statecraft or fair romance,  
Than Claudius, best and truest of all friends."

## VI

He ceased, and Claudius, rising to his feet,  
Thus in reply: "Kind words, my king. Me-  
thinks

Too good you are to me. Yet if these lips,  
Unfolding some fair story of old Rome,  
Can add aught to the pleasure of this feast,  
Right gladly will they speak." Then Claudius  
thus.

## CLAUDIUS'S STORY

(CÆSAR IN EGYPT)

### VII

KNOW, knights and ladies, that, though Roman  
born

Am I, and Roman were my forebears all,  
In Egypt did I pass my early youth,  
For Egypt long hath been of Rome a part.  
Let me, therefore, tonight, a famous tale  
Of Egypt tell, that wondrous, ancient land,  
Whose earliest beginnings no man knows—  
Lost in the mists of prehistoric days.

For old she was ere Greece and Rome were born,  
And wise her kings, and heaven-inspired her  
priests,

And filled with learning her philosophers  
Past comprehension, and than any spot  
On earth more celebrated was this land  
For architect and builder, and e'en now  
(Though centuries long have passed since they  
were made

And all forgotten are their makers' names)  
Sphinxes and pyramids and temples vast

Fill all the valley of the sacred Nile,  
 Like Nature's works, imperishable. Fixed  
 As are the granite bases of the hills,  
 And like the hills defying storm and time.  
 So all compact of wonders is this land.  
 Yet not of ancient Egypt is my tale,  
 But rather of a later, modern day,  
 When first the Roman came and o'er the Nile  
 The shadows of the Roman eagles fell;  
 A later, modern day, when here on earth  
 The spirit of the mighty Julius dwelt  
 Among us, the first Cæsar, ere the hands  
 Of envious assassins dragged him down.  
 Aye, here in Egypt did his spirit roam  
 (Midst sphinx and pyramid and temple vast),  
 With Cleopatra, Egypt's wondrous queen.  
 Of him, the great first Cæsar, is my tale.

## VIII

Now, Cæsar, having Pompey overthrown,  
 To Egypt came; and in that city fair  
 By Alexander founded, stayed a space,  
 Gathering his legions round him once again.  
 For Ptolemy, the king, and the young queen,  
 His sister, Cleopatra, strove for power  
 Each against other, and discord filled the land  
 And civic strife, and Cæsar sent to each  
 A summons to appear, that he might weigh  
 The merits of the quarrel, but the king

Still held aloof, and from the youthful queen,  
His sister, Cleopatra, naught was heard.

**IX**

Now as, one day, within his palace sat  
Cæsar, in silence labouring at his desk,  
By weighty matters of the state engrossed,  
Alone save for a sunburnt sentinel  
Who at the portals of the chamber stood,  
Voices he heard without; then in the door,  
After a little space, with measured step  
And military mien, the sentry strode  
And, halting before Cæsar, thus to him,  
Like an automaton saluting, spoke:

**X**

“Sire, in the hall a carpet dealer waits,  
Seeking to show his goods—precious are they  
Beyond compare, so do his words aver—  
From Bagdad on the Tigris hath he come—  
Admission to thy presence doth he crave.”

**XI**

Then Cæsar, weary of his morning’s work,  
And curious to behold the fabrics rare,  
Assented and, forthwith, into the room  
The merchant came, bearing upon his back  
The roll of carpets precious beyond words.  
And precious beyond words they proved to be.

For as the merchant did his merchandise  
Slowly unwind upon the palace floor,  
Behold, hidden within its emerald sheen,  
A maiden like a milky pearl appeared,  
Who, when she Cæsar saw, rose to her feet,  
Displaying to his eyes her lovely form,  
Like Aphrodite rising from the sea.  
Then toward the Roman venturing a few steps  
She fell upon her knees and at his feet  
In supplication beautiful remained.

## XII

Then Cæsar to the merchant. "Who is this?"  
And answered him the other (no merchant he  
But loyal seneschal): "It is the queen.  
The Queen of Egypt, Cleopatra, sire.  
Strange may it seem to find her here, but she,  
Albeit a girl still in her teens, doth brook  
No opposition, e'en from such as I,  
Grown grey in the state's service, and this  
scheme,  
Which now thou dost behold, by stratagem  
To reach thy presence and present her case,  
Is hers and hers alone. Hence came we here.  
Obedient am I to the realm, my lord,  
And when my queen doth speak, whate'er her  
words,  
My duty 'tis to obey. This have I done."  
Thus earnestly the loyal seneschal,  
Apollodorus, the Sicilian old.

## XIII

Then Cleopatra: "Everywhere are spies,  
Assassins, and I feared that to thy house  
Safely I could not come; so at the last  
Apollodorus greatly I besought  
By stratagem to bring me to thy side,  
That I with my own tongue might plead my  
cause."

## XIV

Then Cæsar: "Rise, my queen. On this divan  
Be seated. Thus shall Egypt side by side  
With Rome appear. So thou art Egypt's  
queen?"

## XV

And Cleopatra. "Aye, with Ptolemy,  
My brother, do I share the throne. But now,  
By unwise counsel led, hath Ptolemy  
Declared himself my foe. Methinks if thou—  
(Please pardon me, my lord, for saying it)  
If thou dost wish it, I am Egypt's queen."

## XVI

Then Cæsar bade a palace be prepared  
For Cleopatra, and a retinue  
Of slaves be furnished, that her every wish  
Might be accomplished; and from her own home

In Upper Egypt, where she long had dwelt,  
She called her faithful counsellors of state,  
And for her household servitors she sent,  
Who since her birth to her had ministered.  
And Cæsar did proclaim her Egypt's queen,  
And bade all men obey her, and dispatched  
Troops against Ptolemy and, in the end,  
A rebel against Rome, the boy was slain.

## XVII

And long with Cleopatra in the land  
Did Cæsar dwell—the land of Egypt old,  
And many a night upon the magic Nile  
They floated, and by day the cities fair  
Explored which fill its valley, and beheld  
The innumerable marvels of the land—  
Memphis the mighty, and Gizeh's pyramids,  
And the great Sphinx, and hundred-gated Thebes,  
Where once in splendour did the Pharaohs reign,  
And still in splendour do their mummies rest,  
And where, beside the river, Memnon sits  
Colossal, and the rising sun salutes  
With mystic music. For a wondrous barge  
Had Egypt's queen, where two-score men and  
ten  
Sat at the oars, and rose a snowy sail  
Of stoutest linen, and upon this sail,  
Broidered in gold and crimson, were displayed  
A lily and papyrus intertwined—  
From immemorial time the royal arms

Of immemorial Pharaohs—symbol fair  
Of Upper and of Lower Egypt linked  
In harmony. And likewise had this barge  
Of Cleopatra cabins manifold,  
For comfort and for ease luxurious planned,  
And sheltered were the decks with awnings fair,  
And on that deck—the uppermost—where free  
The dallying breezes came—high o'er the wave—  
Tables were set and couches for the feast,  
And trained attendants waited and, that naught  
Which helps to pleasure might be missing, here  
Harpers made sweetest music with their harps.  
And many a night, perchance, while hung the  
    moon

Above them, slowly moving through the heavens,  
They revelled till the golden orb grew pale  
Low in the west—behind that pyramid,  
The mightiest and most ancient, which, 'tis said,  
King Cheops built—and vanish't were the stars  
Throughout the heavens, and in the east the sun  
Appeared, rising from out the desert sands  
As from the ocean, and all the eastern sky  
A field of topaz was and amethyst,  
And all the desert red with the new day.  
And lo, as thus, one night, they revelled long,  
Together sitting, and the wine of Rome  
Falernian sipping (between midnight 'twas  
And morning), Cæsar, ruler of the world,  
And Cleopatra, Egypt's queen, thus spake  
A sage grey-bearded, standing them before:

## XVIII

"Four thousand miles, so say the records old,  
This river runs; four thousand miles it is  
From the blue ocean to its silvery source  
Mysterious. Through this ancient land it  
flows

Like winding serpent huge, but like a god  
Beneficent it is, for all the land  
Were desert but for Nile. Would I could see  
The fountains fair from which its waters spring!  
The hidden sources of this wondrous stream!  
Two lakes there are, so say the travellers old,  
Deep in the equatorial forests set;  
And from the larger lake doth issue forth,  
Through rock-bound doors, the Nile; and close  
at hand,

Guarding Nile's portals, giant mountains rise,  
Snow-capped. The Country of the Moon 'tis  
called;

And these are called the Mountains of the  
Moon.

Why? I know not. Unless it is, my lord,  
Because the moon doth ever shine so bright  
Upon those snowy summits. But, alas,  
Like sirens do they lure but to destroy.

Many have sought but few have reached this  
goal,

For thick beset with dangers is the road—  
Dangers and difficulties insurmountable.

Six cataracts there are beyond Asswan  
Ere far Khartoum we reach; and at Khartoum  
Two streams unite, and one of these is Nile,  
And one his tributary; and beyond—  
Beyond Khartoum is mystery. From a land  
Far to the south the mighty river comes,  
But 'tis a land unknown, impenetrable,  
The country of the Ethiopians fierce,  
Where none dare venture without arms. Me-  
thinks

A god recumbent, with his head enveiled,  
Is father Nile; for though his puissant limbs  
Are fair to see, yet hidden is his head,  
Veiled from the world through centuries. Would  
that I

Could lift that veil and for myself behold  
This god's fair head! For though in other  
days

Have other eyes beheld it, and rejoiced,  
Yet what is that to me since these old orbs,  
Long eager for the sight, have seen it not?  
Could I but stand beside those fountains fair,  
Thrice happy should I die. But he who seeks  
To make this journey perilous time and strength  
Must have—time, strength and gold. Nay, sire,  
for me,

A dreamer, it is not. But were I thou,  
Cæsar, the ruler of the world, this night  
My voyage should begin—this night should be  
The start auspicious of my pilgrimage."

## XIX

Thus spake the turbaned sage, and in his eyes  
And in his voice and in his lifted hand  
The fires of youth, long smouldering, woke once  
more.  
And in his speech impassioned was disclosed  
The dream of a long life still unfulfilled.

## XX

Then Cæsar: "Well thou dreamest, greybeard  
sage;  
Aye, well thou speakest. For like thee am I.  
And like thy soul so ever doth mine own  
Adventure seek. The fountains of the Nile!  
The source from which these magic waters flow  
O'er which doth glide our boat! Would that  
my eyes  
Could see that spot—that region of delight!  
Methinks the nymphs do ever beckon me  
That in those silent lakes abide—those lakes  
High in the mystic Mountains of the Moon  
Like twin pearls set—those lakes miraculous  
Whence spring Nile's waters, on their journey  
long  
Outstarting. For until they reach the sea  
Ne'er do they halt, but through the desert land—  
All nourishing—all blessing—do they flow.  
What sayest thou, my queen? Would that we  
twain

Together might essay that journey long,  
Together might explore that land of dreams,  
Those realms enchanted? Would that up this  
stream,  
Past far Asswan and Philæ's templed isle,  
On—on into that unknown Nubian land,  
For days, weeks, months, aye years we might  
pursue  
Our lingering way? What sayest thou, dearest  
one?"

## xxi]

And Cleopatra answered. "Where thou goest,  
There will I go, my lord. E'en to the halls  
Of Sheol's realm, where great Osiris sits  
In judgment o'er the spirits of the dead,  
If thou dost bid me do it, there I'll go.  
How much more joyful then to follow thee  
On this adventure beautiful." Thus spake  
The queen Egyptian, and on Cæsar bent  
Her wondrous eyes, those eyes which did in-  
spire

The kings of earth to battle, or in sweet  
Captivity their spirits did ensnare.  
For of the race of Ptolemy the Greek  
She was, and in her life once more did flower  
That beauty rare which, in an earlier day,  
The lovely Helen bore—she who to Troy  
Led all the Grecian hosts—in arms for her.

## XXII

So dreamed the lovers in those magic hours  
'Twixt midnight and the morning, when all  
things

Thrice easy of accomplishment do seem.

So dreamed the lovers, but 'twas not to be.

For ever must the helmsman keep his hand  
Upon the helm or runs the ship awry,

And ever must the hand of Cæsar steer

The Roman State, or shipwreck follows fast.

And with the daylight came a Roman knight  
Riding in haste, and signalled to the barge,  
Desiring Cæsar, and him Cæsar saw,

And this his message—"That Pharnaces, son  
Of Mithridates, an old foe of Rome,

Had trouble-maker turned; and in the land  
Of Asia Minor all the petty kings

And tetrarchs in rebellion were, and fast

The fire was spreading, and throughout the  
East

The rule of Rome was threatened." This and  
more

That Roman knight disclosed. And Cæsar  
rose,

And swiftly to the land of Syria passed,

And thence, with legions three, all soldiers good,  
Who had with him in Gaul and Britain served,

On Asia Minor turned; and at the town

Of Zela he Pharnaces overthrew,

And peace restored throughout the Roman realm.

And yet so swiftly and so easily  
'Twas done that Cæsar, to a friend in Rome  
This message, "Veni, vidi, vici," sent—  
"I came, I saw, I conquered." Then once more  
To Cleopatra and the Nile he turned.  
But never to those fountains wonderful  
Of Nilus did he journey for, alas,  
Short is our earthly life, and in this world  
What we *must* do, is done; and, often times,  
What most we long to do, undone remains.

*End of Claudius's Story*

XXIII

Thus Claudius, painting with a loving hand  
This picture of the palmy days of Rome,  
Of the first Cæsar, and of Egypt's queen,  
Last of the Greeks and Macedonia's line:  
Thus Claudius, and, in silence for a space  
Sat, gazing into air, as if far off  
Still dwelt his spirit, by the magic Nile  
Wandering, perchance, with Cleopatra near.  
For as, oftentimes, the teller of a tale  
Almost his own identity doth lose  
The while he tells it, and his hero's life  
Becomes his own, and to his hero's deeds  
His own adventurous spirit enters in,

E'en as the actor doth project himself  
Into the part of him he represents,  
So did the soul of Claudius, as his lips  
This story told, of Cæsar in the East,  
Take on the portraiture of him he drew,  
That man of men, the flower of ancient Rome  
And all mankind, whose spirit did transcend  
So far the bounds of human excellence  
That, to a wondering world, he did appear  
Not human, but divine; not man, but god.  
Yet, like the Nazarene, by cruel hands,  
Urged on by hearts obdurate, he was slain.

**XXIV**

“A noble tale well told,” quoth Attila,  
And smote his hands together in delight.  
And round the board uprose the loud applause  
Of hands and voice, and many a lady fair  
On Claudius let her soft eyes linger long,  
For comely was he and to be desired  
Beyond all other men in that high hall.  
And when, at last, the loud applause had died,  
Thus to his guests once more the Hunnish king.

**XXV**

“Once on a time, as by the Danube’s bank  
We lingered, brother Claudius and myself,  
Before our tent a Gothic harper sang.  
Sad was his song, but in my heart it stayed,

And there it still remains. And there, methinks,  
Ever it will remain until I die.  
And through the Hunnish land this harper old  
I sought till I had found him once again.  
And hither did I bring him, and tonight  
Before you shall he sing, my honoured guests.  
And deep into your hearts, perchance, his song,  
Though passing sad, will sink and there remain;  
E'en as it sank in mine and doth remain.  
My Claudio, wilt thou bid the bard appear?  
Below he is, perchance, in the great hall."

## XXVI

Then to a lackey Claudio spoke and soon  
Up on the dais came the Gothic bard,  
Otho, with harp in hand; and low he bowed  
Before the king; and like a prophet old,  
With flowing beard and noble countenance,  
He looked; and like a heaven-inspired bard  
He smote the strings, and mystic music rose  
And filled the hall, and sat the guests entranced.

## XXVII

Then, as before, by Danube's yellow wave,  
Sigurd he sang, the flower of all the North;  
And how he Fafnir slew, the dragon fierce,  
And made the Niblung's mighty Hoard his own;  
And won the mystic Ring which rules the Hoard;

And sought, through circling fire, the valkyr maid,  
 Brynhild, whom Odin, father of the gods,  
 Above all others loved; and how, returned  
 To Burgundy, the lily maid Gudrun  
 He wedded, sister of a noble king;  
 And how, at last, deep in the Odenwald,  
 Slain by a boar, he fell; but ah, perchance,  
 'Twas not a boar, but envious enemies  
 Who laid him low. So all the people said.  
 Dark enemies who slew him as the night  
 Blots out the golden, vivifying sun.  
 Thus sang that Gothic minstrel, from his harp  
 Plucking, meanwhile, a weird accompaniment.

**XXVIII**

Then Attila. "But whither went the Ring,  
 The mystic ruler of the Niblung Hoard?  
 Methinks 'tis strange if thing so valuable  
 Were lost forever. Knowest thou, harper,  
 that?"

**XXIX**

And Otho. "Nothing do I know, my king,  
 But what I say. But here, in Burgundy,  
 Surely there must be some who know its fate."

**XXX**

Then Hagen thus, upon whose gloomy face  
 Disquietude now sat. "Pardon, my king,

I crave for this intrusion on thy feast.  
Sad is the harper's tale, and well 'tis known  
In Burgundy, for here Earl Sigurd died.  
Slain by a boar was he in Odenwald—  
An ancient solitary. None than I  
Better can tell the tale, for in the hunt  
Myself took part. All day, from early morn,  
We sought our quarry but o'ertook him not.  
And in the afternoon to a deep glen,  
By chance, we came, Prince Giselher and myself.  
And here, upon the ground, almost a corpse,  
We found, alas, the noble Sigurd stretched.  
But e'er he died the Niblung's mystic Ring  
He from his finger drew and gave to me."

## XXXI

"Methinks to his fair widow—now my queen—  
The circlet should have gone." Thus Attila.  
"What wantest thou with rings? A spear,  
forsooth,  
With which to kill thy prostrate enemy,  
Would better suit thee. Prithee, lift up thy  
hand,  
Sir Hagen, that we all may see the Ring,  
For filled with curiosity are we."

## XXXII

Then to Gudrun turned Attila the Hun.  
"My queen, is that the Niblung's mystic Ring  
Which ever on his hand bright Sigurd wore?"

## XXXIII

Answered Gudrun: "Aye, 'tis bright Sigurd's Ring.

And he who wears it now was Sigurd's foe,  
And Sigurd's murderer. Oh, my lord, alas,  
That he should be alive and Sigurd gone!"

## XXXIV

Then on the gloomy knight were all eyes bent  
As slowly rose he up and faltering spake.

"Surely, my king, this lady, though thy wife,  
Doth accusation false against me bring.

These princes twain, Gernot and Giselher,  
Can vouch my story true. They, like myself,  
Through the deep wood were seeking the wild  
boar

When in the shadowy glen we Sigurd found.  
They, like myself, beheld him, ere he died,  
Place in my hand the Niblung's mystic Ring.  
Is it not so, Gernot and Giselher?"

## XXXV

As shakes a leaf before the rising blast  
So Giselher trembled. "Aye, 't is so," he said.

## XXXVI

But Gernot answered. "Nay, 'tis not the truth.  
Long have I silent been, but now no more

I'll hold my peace. When into that drear glen  
I plunged, all unaware of murder foul,  
Upon the ground Earl Sigurd I beheld,  
Stretched out in death's embrace, and over him  
Standing, with bloody spear, this basest wretch,  
Hagen. My brother, partner to the deed,  
In silent satisfaction viewed the scene.  
For him alone, because he was my kin,  
I've held my peace; for Giselher's sake alone.  
And then what good to speak? The deed was  
done.

And naught could bring our Sigurd back to life.  
But now no more the coward will I play.  
On Hagen's head the blood of Sigurd lies.  
Murderer! Base villain inexpressible!"

## XXXVII

He ceased, and tumult filled the mighty hall.

## XXXVIII

"Seize him," cried Attila, "and from his hand  
Remove the Niblung's Ring. Surely a knave  
So base should cumber not the ways of earth."

## XXXIX

Then on the towering Hagen leaped a score  
Of Huns ferocious, warriors tried and true,  
And from his finger was the glittering Ring  
Torn, e'en as in the fabled days of old

By Hreidmar from Andvari's hand 'twas torn.  
And from all sides the Hunnish soldiers rushed  
Into the hall and filled it, and a wall  
Of many thousands round about it formed,  
So that completely girt was the great hall.  
And Hagen, bound and held by many hands,  
Cried out with a loud voice, "Give me the Ring!  
Alas, my Ring!" But Attila only laughed,  
Even as ancient Hreidmar once did laugh,  
And on his finger placed the mystic Ring.  
And Hagen, as they bore him to the floor,  
Shrieked out once more with rage, "Thee I defy,  
Thou devilish Hun!" But cruel fingers tore  
The tongue from out his mouth, and bound he  
was  
With iron chains, and on the floor he lay  
Helpless, to wait the pleasure of the king.

**XL**

Then from the dais came the king's command:  
"Bring forth into the middle of the hall  
Hagen, and strike his head from off his trunk,  
That I, with mine own eyes, may now behold  
Justice, though long delayed, administered,  
And punishment to fit his many crimes  
Inflicted on this most inhuman wretch."  
And out before the dais steps, forthwith,  
All in the middle of the mighty hall,  
Was Hagen brought, and set before the king,

And from his body huge his head was struck,  
E'en as the king had ordered. And, behold,  
When Giselher saw the sight (either from fear  
Of sharing Hagen's fate, or that the gods  
Had struck him down), he fell back in his seat,  
Lifeless, and thus, at the same time, the twain  
Perished, and down the shadowy road which  
leads  
To Hela's realms their ghosts together fled.

## XLI

Then thus spake Attila, the king of kings.  
"A sorry sight is this, my guests—my friends:  
A tragic end to our festivities.  
But like the lightning's bolt, unheralded,  
So fall the bolts of Fate. 'Tis destiny.  
No evil in the end unpunished goes.  
Myself knew not this man. His dastard crime  
Was cloaked on earth with crafty secrecy.  
But all the heavens and the assembled gods  
Beheld the deed, and the impartial Fates  
Decreed his earthly end and punishment.  
Myself am but the human instrument,  
The sword with which the fiat is made good.  
And now, this deed accomplished, must I leave  
Fair Burgundy, and onward into Gaul  
Press swiftly, there mine enemies to face.  
And in thy house, and to thy kingly care,  
My brother Gunter, till I do return,

Gudrun I leave, Gudrun my wife and queen,  
Dearest of all things upon earth to me.  
For in my dreams a field of dreadful strife  
Ever I see, a carnage terrible,  
Where baffled are the hosts of Hungary.  
A battle ruthless, obstinate, immense,  
Where fights the West against the encroaching  
East.

And ever do I hear a voice, crying,  
'Beware the plains of Chalons, Attila!  
Beware the plains of Chalons!' And, although,  
Perchance these evil harbingers are naught,  
Yet, should I die, in peril were my queen.  
Aye, safer were Gudrun in Burgundy."

**XLII**

He ceased, and thus the banquet wonderful,  
Of Attila the Great, came to an end.

## IX

### GUDRUN AND ANDVARI

#### I

“ANDVARI, come! Hasten, thou Niblung dwarf,  
That I into thy pillaged hands may give  
The mystic Ring, so long from thee withheld!”

#### II

Thus spake Gudrun, beside the silvery Rhine  
Standing, then from her finger drew the ring—  
The golden serpent with two ruby eyes—  
And softly rubbed that glittering band malign.  
And as, today, the radio message flies,  
Needing no wire, by Nature’s laws propelled,  
So through the air, to that far Niblung’s cave,  
The message of Gudrun, unaided, flew,  
She the possessor of the mystic Ring.  
And by a power occult the Niblung dwarf,  
A magian skilful, mounted to the sky  
And, like a bird, the silent ether clove,  
Bending his swift flight toward the German land  
Soon o’er the Rhine he hovered, then, like a  
hawk

Gigantic, swooping suddenly on his prey,  
 Descended till, upon the river bank,  
 Where waited Attila's fair queen, he stood.  
 Her seeing, low he bowed with reverence deep.

## III

"Me didst thou call, fair lady? Happy am I  
 That on thy finger shines the Niblung's Ring!  
 The mystic ruler of the mighty Hoard!  
 Thrice happy that by Hagen's blood-stained  
 hand  
 No more 'tis held. And thou—thou art Gudrun?  
 Thou art bright Sigurd's widow? Aye, 'tis  
 true."

## IV

"Bright Sigurd's widow? Aye, 'tis true. And  
 now  
 Of Attila, the Hunnish king, the wife.  
 But thee from out thy Northland did I call,  
 Andvari, not for gold or precious stones  
 Or fabrics wondrous of the Niblung Hoard,  
 But to set right, at last, a grievous wrong,  
 Long years ago committed. To return  
 To thee, at last, thy Ring. I want it not.  
 Enough have I. Enough of gold and power."

## V

"Lady, dost mean it? Potent is the Ring—  
 Imperial—ruler of the golden Hoard."

VI

Thus spoke the Niblung, but Gudrun replied:

VII

“Precious it is—all potent—wonderful—  
But stained with blood and redolent of crime.  
On Hreidmar’s hand, on Fafnir’s dragon-claw,  
On Hagen’s hateful fingers has it been.  
Accurst it is. Ah no, I want it not.”

VIII

So saying, in Andvari’s palm she placed  
The shining band that rules the Niblung’s  
Hoard.

## FINALE

O TALE heroic! Of my wandering youth  
(Sea-tost e'en like the youth of Sigmund's son)  
The dream thou wast; and fuller manhood strove  
Thee to embody in befitting verse.  
Now finished is the task, which long hath been  
The solace of my grey, declining years.

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